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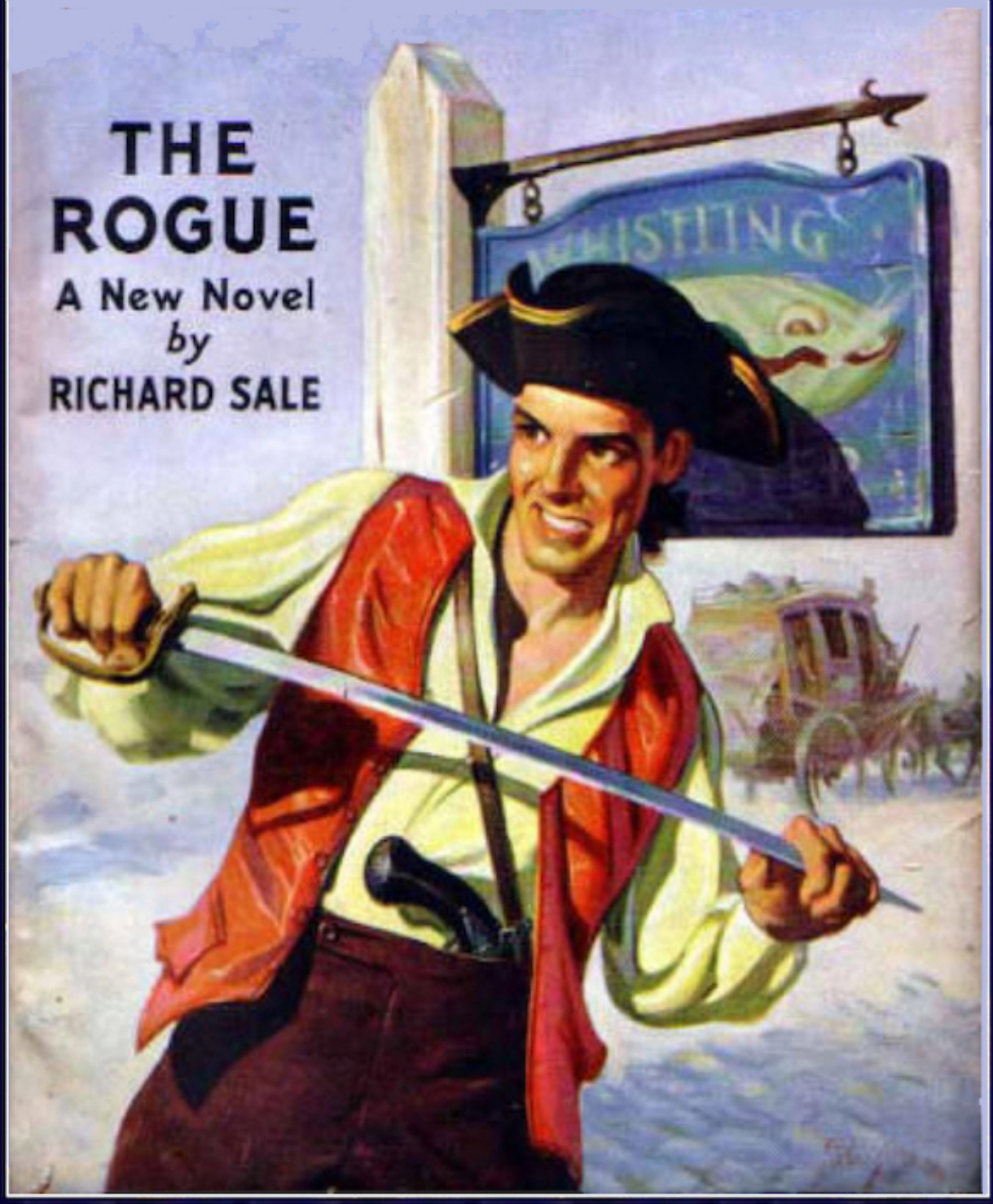
THE ROGUE

A New Novel
by
RICHARD SALE



THE ROGUE

by
Richard Sale

“The Rogue” originally appeared in
Argosy Weekly, June & July 1938

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THE ROGUE

By RICHARD SALE
Author of "The Enchanted Mug," "The Gentleman from Virginia," etc.

The Rogue

1781—Howe and Cornwallis await the next rebel move—and John Hamilton rides with the young nation's safety in his pocket and his sword at his side. Beginning a story of high adventure in Old Virginia

PROLOG

IT WAS summer, the month of July was nearing its end, and the year was 1781. In New York City, General Howe and his British soldiers rested waiting for the Old Fox to make a move. Southward Lord Cornwallis with his diminished force of fourteen hundred men had retreated to Yorktown from the Carolinas where General Nathaniel Greene had outbaffled him, there to meet fresh reinforcements from New York, together with the men of Benedict Arnold, turned traitor to the American cause. Yorktown was under fortification, and seven thousand British waited for action. Facing Cornwallis at Richmond was the commander of all the American troops in Virginia, the Marquis de Lafayette, who also waited, his own plans depending upon those of General Washington.

In Chesapeake Bay, the British fleet under Sir Samuel Hood and consisting of fourteen ships of the line waited to encounter De Grasse and the French fleet, twenty-four capital ships, en route to the Chesapeake, guns ready, decks cleared for action, spoiling for a battle. There was an alliance, the French and Americans. There was a chance of united action against Cornwallis, one crushing blow which might end the war.

The armies tensed and waited. Lafayette, restless in Richmond; General Greene,

The Colonial parried with his long rifle

rising up from the south; Washington, on the march somewhere in the north.

But Washington was the crux. With him lay the decision for battle, the brain to place each army on the chessboard, and he was in the north, perhaps in New Jersey, perhaps upon the Hudson River. And his priceless plans were somewhere, equally vague, in the hands of faithful dispatch riders who were speeding southward.

British agents of His Majesty's Intelligence frantically scoured the coast for a sign of these riders and these plans. Taken, they would disclose Washington's line of march, he might be intercepted, his army vanquished, the American cause destroyed.

The eleventh hour, and Congress in Philadelphia, torn by internal dissension and gloom, sat upon pins and needles and waited, with the world, to see the end.

It was ironic that the placid and fertile valley of Virginia which had long since dropped out of the theatre of war, and was going on about its business in its same old way, should suddenly have been the stage for these fleeting messengers and the hostile agents of the King who coveted their lives. . . .

CHAPTER I

A TORY'S BROTHER

HE WAS big, so much so that he filled the doorway of the little tavern on Maiden Lane, Winchester, Virginia. So big that his shadow cast itself upon the roughened planks of the floor, long, ponderous, monstrous. The sun was behind his back so that the shadow crept all the way in and over to the bar where men stood and drank. But actually there was nothing monstrous or ponderous about him. His face was rawboned and very deeply tanned. His eyes were gaily bright and filled with silent laughter. He was smiling. Those eyes, so finely gray that sometimes they turned green, were flicking around the place, searching for someone. Beneath his tricornered hat, his hair could be seen, instantly red in the sunlight, fading quietly to copper in the shade as he moved within. His movements were graceful, no awkwardness there. His footsteps matched the tempered beauty and sleekness of the

Italian rapier which hung in its sheath at his left hip, counterbalanced at his right hip by the weight of a pistol in its holster. His black coat was pulled in snugly by a broad buckled belt at his waist. He was not the sort of man to wear lace, but he wore it this day, drooping from his cuff, and bunched under his throat. In contrast, the men at the tavern were all dressed in frontier clothes, rain-stained buckskin and tattered homespun.

At one end of the bar, two men were arguing noisily, and the others had become interested. One of the two was a quiet sort of man whose left arm was missing. An empty sleeve hung where the arm had once been. His opponent was younger, dressed better, and of a type which gets unbearable in argument.

"I tell you all," this second man said nastily, "this fight for so-called freedom is a blind, a mere blind, do you hear me? What kind of freedom will we have? What assurance will we have that there will be no autocracy, no monarchy here should we defeat King George? It will be the same thing over again—maybe worse! God knows times were hard enough before this war, but now! Gadzooks, how much worse could they get?"

The armless man sighed. "No one denies that war makes for troubled times. But when we win, you'll see the change come."

"When we win," grunted the second man. "Win what? An emperor? For this Washington who heads the armies is an emperor! He'll make himself an emperor of America when the war is done. He'll become a living Caesar, he'll be worse than a king—"

"That's a lie!"

"Why a lie? He wants power! You've heard his messages to the Congress. Give me this, give me that! Give, give, give! Not asking. *Telling* them! He's a foreign-monger. Who heads our armies? Americans? Damme no! Not Americans. He gives commands to the French—to Lafayette, to the Poles, to the Prussians! By gad, I tell you, there are more foreigners in the army than there are Americans."

"And what have they to gain?" asked the armless man. "They fight for an ideal. You should be grateful for that."

"An ideal!" The second man sneered, "They fight for gold, our gold, poured into their pockets by that stupid Congress! Davis, you are a fool! An arm gone to make a tyrant, to bolster the might of a madman whose only quest is power—"

THE second man stopped talking suddenly, finding himself confronted with the body of the big man who had entered the tavern. "Eh?"

"You talk too much," said the big man, smiling. "And your opinion is worth nothing." He turned, touched the empty sleeve of the other arguer. "Where did you lose this, my friend?"

"At Monmouth," said the armless man. "And you limp too."

"Two toes gone," was the reply. "At Valley Forge. I froze them off. That was a hard winter."

"And you, sir," the big man asked the other. "You look remarkably fit. You have fought under General Washington?"

The second man flushed. "No."

"You have not—ah—fought at all?"

There was no answer. None was needed.

"You see," went on the big man, "why I do not value your opinion at all, my friend. Your views are from, shall we say, exceedingly long range."

"And who, sir," asked the second man hotly, "are you?"

He received his answer quickly. A man in buckskin detached himself from a group and sprang forward. His face was wrinkled by wind and rain until it was pure leather. He wore a coonskin cap with a tail that hung down the back of his neck. He sprang to the big man and threw his arms around him and cried, "Hamilton! John Hamilton! By the beard o' Cornstalk, if it ain't the rogue of Shenandoah come back again! Johnny, ye lopsided fop, what a sight ye' are for these eyes! What are ye doin' in this town anyhow?"

"Looking for you," Hamilton said, laughing as he beat Caleb Woodstock's

shoulders, "and settling disputes on internal disorders." He glanced around but the loud haranguer had vanished quietly and quickly. "How are you, Caleb? By gad, you're getting fat!"

"That's a rank insult," Caleb said goodnaturedly. "That's all muscle ye see, even if my chest has dropped some. Glory be, Johnny lad, it's good to see ye! I heard that ye brother sent ye to Eurrup to do some book learnin' and try an' make ye a gentleman! I never expected to see ye again."

"I'm back," Hamilton said. "Matter of the fact is this: Titus fancies himself a respectable aristocrat in this Virginia valley and the hobnobbings of his infernal brother—*moi,* that's French for me—bothered him, so he packed me off to Paris. Principally, however, because I was threatening to ride north and join General Washington's rascals. That would have been the last straw for Titus. He dislikes me enough to fondle with the idea of me dropping in some battle with a bullet in me, but on the other hand, Titus is still enough of a Tory to want me to drop on the right side. So Paris it was! I've been away over a year, Cal! I'll bet you never even knew it!"

Caleb Woodstock chuckled. "Knew it well enough. Been over a year since I heard any wild tales 'bout ye. Last time I seen ye, Johnny was the night ye got yeself wine-soaked at the Whistling Oyster in Lace Falls. Glory, what a night! And was ye brother hoppin' when I dragged ye in home! But ye've changed a mite, lad. Ye've grown up some. Ye look like a man now. Did ye enjoy yeself with the furriners?"

"Paris, Caleb, is heaven. The ladies, ah!" Hamilton blew a kiss to the ceiling. "The men—what swordsmen! They taught me—yes, I took instruction there, no less. And before that, I considered myself quite a fellow. But those French, by gad, they knew their steel. And how has it been with you, old trapper?"

"Fair to middlin', middlin' to fair," Caleb said. "Times is kinda hard all about. Folks is grumblin', things is bad, and times —well, there's discontent. I guess everyone has had a bellyful o' this war. They wish it was done with quick. What are ye doin' in this man's town? How long have ye been returned?"

Hamilton's eyes twinkled. "You don't believe I came to see you?"

"'Course not, ye always was a mighty liar."

Hamilton laughed. "Well, the truth then, Cal. I've been back a week. Upon my return, I found that dear Titus, fearful that I might renew my ambition to join up with the Colonials, had arranged for my wedding with Miss Anne Norwood of Winchester. Frankly, I do not dislike the idea at all, but there is disgraceful haste in the arrangements which awes me. But you can imagine how Titus Hamilton and old Hardflint Norwood can arrange things to their own liking, when they've a mind. I fancy, although I know she loves me, that poor Anne has had precious little to say in the matter. So there you are. Marriage tomorrow evening at four."

"Lawd!" Caleb breathed. "I can't exactly see ye a married man, Johnny, but then they say God in his wonder works amazin' miracles. Ain't ye brother Titus gonna see the weddin'?"

"He wouldn't miss it! What? Offend Hardflint Norwood? My, my no, Cal! He'll arrive sometime tomorrow afternoon. He said he had business which kept him over. Something about his Home Protectors."

"Home Protectors," Caleb grunted in distaste. "Huh! Let's have a drink to wipe away the sound of that one!"

●

BUT you couldn't wipe away the sound of a thousand men with a single drink. For the Home Protectors numbered almost that, one thousand men who trained at night in the cornfields under the stars with working rifles and sidearms and some few fine cannon to boot. There was ammunition in quantity also,

hidden only where Titus Hamilton himself knew, and held under lock and key. And after nocturnal drill, the arms would be returned to the storehouse, and the men would disband and go to their homes.

The Home Protectors was Titus Hamilton's all the way. It was a much-duped little army. Titus went the way the wind blew, but at heart he was a Tory. John Hamilton knew that. But this army which trained at night had originally come together as a protective sort of company to guard the homes and farms of the valley from invasion. It was not specifically stated whether it was Colonial or Tory. In fact, its prime purpose was to hold off *both* Colonial or Tory raiders, for both armies had appetites, and that meant the ravaging of farm lands. The theatre of war had moved east. The Virginia valley, let alone, had begun to go about its business of planting and rearing crops. No farmer, from the long-lined Hamiltons down to the poor, hungry squatters, wanted his lands over-run with soldiers of either side.

But over a period of time, there was an insidious change in these Home Protectors. More and more, they leaned toward the cause of the British. Titus Hamilton had done this with his smooth and polished tongue, his clever, subtle talks with his command. Tacitly, slowly, often unknowingly, these armed men of the Protectors found themselves anti-Continental.

Lord Peter Cartwright and Sir Gerald Mackey, both of London, did not grunt and think to drink away the idea of the Home Protectors as Caleb Woodstock was doing in Winchester, at John Hamilton's side.

Indeed, the contrary. At that same moment, they were in Lace Falls, the Hamilton family seat, on urgent business concerning these thousand armed men. They were the temporary guests of the inn on Gage Street, and had ridden up to Scarsta, the Hamilton plantation, for a conference with Titus Hamilton, master of Scarsta, and the Home Protectors. And while Caleb Woodstock threw off a jigger of rum in Winchester, Lord Cartwright and Sir Gerald were sipping Titus' hospitable wine in Lace Falls and waiting to come to their point.

Titus was flattered slightly by their presence. One a peer, the other a knight. The Virginia valley did not often boast the presence of good Englishmen as guests. Nor, he thought, could it boast the Richmond commander of his Majesty's Intelligence, which Lord Cartwright was.

PRESENTLY, when the wine was gone, Lord Cartwright said, "Hamilton, I'll be as brief as possible because—your charming hospitality to the side—there is no telling in this valley whether the next man you meet is a Tory or a Continental."

"Safer here though," Titus rumbled, "than in Richmond with Lafayette and his soldiers your next door neighbors."

"True enough," Cartwright replied ruefully. "And yet there we can be sure of enemies. Here, it is a problem whether to trust a man or not. I do not mean you, of course. We trust you implicitly. Well, to the point. We have come all the way from Richmond for one purpose. The Home Protectors. Hamilton, Cornwallis needs those men—those men and arms and cannon."

"Does he?"

"Desperately," said Lord Cartwright. "Cornwallis' position is dangerous at the moment. He needs reinforcement and supply. Should Washington possibly unite with Lafayette, there is no telling what the result. The French, too, have allied with the Americans. You heard?"

"Yes." Titus sat back, enjoying the fact that he held an ace. "But gentlemen, while I would dearly love to send these men to the support of Cornwallis at Yorktown, the fact remains that these arms and ammunition were furnished by me alone, and at considerable cost. More than that, their removal from the valley would leave us unprotected—"

Lord Cartwright smiled. "We speak the

same language, Hamilton, I see. Shall we be open then?"

Titus nodded, pleased. "By all means."

"I have a contract here," Cartwright said, laying the parchment on the table. "It is the best we can do. It has been authorized by the King to whom your family is, of course, known."

"And it says?"

Cartwright replied, "Land grants from all rebel property confiscations at the close of hostilities. In the Virginia valley, that is. All these to be tax free, your family to be tax free, and you to be knighted by the King."

"Well," said Titus, immeasurably pleased, folding his hands in his lap. "And you will need these men when?"

Cartwright said, "At once, sir."

"Gentlemen," Titus said, rising, "His Majesty has been very gracious indeed. I accept the contract, and I promise to have the Home Protectors on the march for Yorktown by tomorrow night."

Lord Cartwright nodded. "We have a Major Caxton with us, Hamilton. He is an agent. He knows Virginia like his own hand. We will confer with him and map out the safest route of march for these men. And too, when we return to Richmond, it would be wise if you could come with us, to seal these contracts unalterably."

"By all means."

There was a knock on the door just then, and when Titus called, a servant entered, carrying a note on a tray. "Fo' Lawd Cartwright," the darkie said. "Dat stable boy frum de inn brawt it, his'n name Ancil. He say it for de Lawd."

"For you, Milord," Titus said, handing it over.

Lord Cartwright glanced at Sir Peter Mackey warily and then read the note. "From Caxton," he said tersely. "La Tournada is here."

Mackey leaped to his feet. "La Tournada? Here? Why?"

"Not now," said Cartwright. "Or, if Hamilton will forgive us, here, read it yourself."

Sir Mackey snatched the note and devoured it with his eyes.

Milord, La Tournada arrived at the inn not ten minutes ago with the startling news that Washington plans to march. She received the information in Richmond and came at once, learning also that the route of the dispatch riders for Lafayette from Washington will be via the Virginia valley. She planned to intercept the messengers, but feeling perhaps that this is better a man's work, I am taking the liberty to reconnoiter northward through the valley myself to look for Washington's men and plans. I have taken Roberts with me. Would advise that you remain at the inn until we return which should be shortly.

Yr. servant,
Major Rolph Caxton

Titus frowned heavily. Bad news then?"

"Rather good," said Mackey. "If Caxton is succesful."

He spoke to Cartwright who nodded. "Yes," Cartwright said thoughtfully. "Yes. If Caxton could get hold of those plans, it might be the end of the war."

CHAPTER II

LESSON IN SWORDPLAY

AS JOHN HAMILTON rode toward Brattle Hill on the night of August second, 1781, he was thinking of beefstakes and the company of a lovely Irish girl. They were to be found, he knew, over the crest of the hill, for at the Inn of the Whistling Oyster Joseph Kilrain Fitzpatrick served unforgettable food—and the charm of Fitzie's daughter Katherine was equally unforgettable.

Then, urging his mare up the slope, John Hamilton remembered suddenly that he should not, by rights, be on this highway at all. He should be by now the loving husband of Miss Anne Norwood of Winchester. All the families of the valley

were aware of this, and before dawn, Hamilton wagered to himself, they would be aware of the rest, too. That there had been no marriage; that doubtless there never would be one. More than that, he, John Hamilton might have some explaining to do and the fact bothered him, simply because there was nothing to explain. He doubted that he had killed George Norwood. On the riposte, he had passed his blade through Norwood's left shoulder, but surely it had missed the lung. Still the whole thing was unconventional; to wound your prospective brother-in-law a few hours before your wedding to his lovely sister.

Riding on, Hamilton was conscious of his one regret, that he had estranged himself permanently from Anne Norwood, and yet that regret could not stifle his intense appetite.

It was a fine night, and the sky over Virginia had mottled itself with stars as it can do no other place else in the world. There was a pale yellow moon hung up in the sky and the light it shed was faintly golden, not silvery. It seemed odd. It had the exquisite hue which tricks you into believing that it could never incur violence.

Brattle Hill loomed up in the night presently. It looked bulky and dark and very welcome. Hamilton sighed a little when he saw it and then relaxed. He reached the crest of Brattle Hill and was going on to descend the south side when he heard a shot. He pulled his horse's head in and ground her to a halt. Bony danced nervously and blew out her nostrils, but even over the sound of that, Hamilton heard the clear and ominous ring of steel on steel and he was shocked because he had taken the moonlight at its face value and believed in its serenity.

Then he saw the flashes. There were golden flashes because they reflected the yellow moon. But there was silver in them, too, where the naked steel caught up the stars from Venus to Orion. The blades rang rhythmically.

John Hamilton hesitated before he rode down and made out the numbers. He saw three horses and then three men. Two of the men held the swords. He assumed that they were gentlemen, since only gentlemen could afford to learn the art of swordplay in a country where the gentry preferred the plough and squirrel rifle. The third man was a soldier and it took but a moment to see that he was a Colonial. His dress was the white buckskin of the Virginia militia, more specifically, a member of Colonel Morgan's raiders, those daring backwoodsmen who had taught Lord Cornwallis that before he could subdue the country's insurrection, he must first subdue the militia of Virginia. He was alone; in his hands he held the long and awkward Pennsylvania rifle, long and awkward because its very length made it the most murderous firearm of them all. He was clubbing with the rifle, this Virginian, using it against the pricks of the twin swords like a halfstaff. It was an uneven duel for the rifle had no point to kill with, yet the man managed to parry the thrusts of the swords. He held the rifle at the stock, its barrel held at extension. He did not lunge, of course, but held back, the length of the barrel protecting him from the length of the swords. By a swinging motion of the barrel, he was keeping the swords off to the right and left of his body.

The other two men were dressed normally enough; they wore black trousers, black waistcoat and buckled shoes but they had no cloaks. One man appeared to be the leader of the two, and he was a gaunt man with a pained face, a long nose and a croaky little frog in his throat. The second man, shorter and heavier, kept calling him, "Major!" as they bore in.

Hamilton kicked Bony hard, and they galloped down the south side of Brattle Hill. They looked like the Devil and his steed come out of Hell itself, for Hamilton's black cloak fluttered in the wind like a bat's wings and Bony snorted noisily as she clattered her hooves down the pike. The moon framed them black and terrible against the sky, and Hamil-

ton had the assurance of pale faces that the spectacle produced respect akin to awe.

HE REACHED the group in a moment, and swung off Bony and hit her rump so that she moved out of line. "Well now, sirs," he said, touching his hat and nodding slightly, "is this a private duel or may anyone join?"

The American barely glanced at him and then looked back at the others to make sure he was protecting himself, despite the interruption. It was like a hardbitten woodsman whose life had, at best, only minutes to live, not to beg a savior for help, nor even show his fear. The swordsmen, however, did not conceal their emotions as well. When they were quite sure that Hamilton was not something supernatural, but a mortal who could take a length of sword in his vitals, the "Major" snapped at him, "And who are you, sir?"

"I consider," Hamilton replied drily, "your question to be an impertinent one, Major." The major started in surprise and peered at him. "I assumed that this was an intrigue, and one hardly identifies himself when he takes a role in an intrigue. To prove that, I'll wager a pound—which constitutes my fortune at this moment—that you'll not tell me yours!"

The shorter man moved close to Hamilton and examined him with critical eyes. He held his sword tightly and his eyes were hard. He said, sneering, "He is only a boy, Major."

"You flatter me, sir," Hamilton remarked gayly. "It is not that I am so young, it is more that I am proficient and conscientious about the use of my razor."

The man called "Major" stiffened and held his ground. His sword he kept at extension, holding off the milita man and cutting away any chance for the soldier to reach his horse and escape. "Away with you, lad," the Major called harshly at Hamilton. "We've bitter business here and more to do than bicker with you. You've stumbled into something that is not your affair and the quicker you'll be gone the better it will be for you."

Hamilton frowned at the man. "It smells like a threat."

"Threat or not," the major snapped, "I say begone, damn you, begone while you can and keep your mouth quiet. You'll not be harmed."

"Aow!" Hamilton groaned.

The short man cried, "What is it?"

"It is my arm," Hamilton replied as if in pain. "It happens often when I hear an insult. It aches."

"Damn this nonsense!" roared the major. "Boot him on his way, Roberts, and finish this business with me!"

"Aha!" Hamilton exclaimed, putting his finger to his nose.

"What now?" the man named Roberts snapped, coldly angry.

"I thought at first you were revenging Tories," Hamilton replied blithely. "I have a fair eye for good solid Tories who are faithful to their King. But now—" he sniffed suggestively and shook his head. "But definitely, but definitely. You have the smell of Englishmen. I thought it might be the barns of the Widow Buckner whose farm lies down in the meadow there. It has been said the wind will raise the smell of cattle to the top of Brattle Hill. But now, now I am sure—Englishmen!"

"You insolent puppy!" Roberts snarled, waving his sword wildly. "If you had a year or two more on your shoulders, I'd give you this steel. But I've no taste for murder of a lad—"

"You're not particular," put in Hamilton quickly, "about the murder of a militia man though?"

"Be damned to the man!" the major roared. "Run the wretch through, Roberts and let's finish this! I'll not be stopped by the prattlings of a big-hipped boy who's out too late tonight."

"Aow!" Hamilton groaned again. "My arm again. The insults hurt it. I can hold it back no longer, it wants my sword." He reached down and whipped out his

blade and it sang ominously as it left the sheaf. "*En garde*, then, my dumpy friend. Let's leave a repast here for the buzzards, although it has been rumored they are particular about the brand of mutton that they eat." He smiled from ear to ear. "Shall we dance, Mr. Roberts?"

THEY sprang at each other, the major lunging once more for the soldier while the man named Roberts made for John Hamilton. Hamilton pulled his opponent away from the major so that he might not take a side-thrust from the other man in the heat of a moment. The soldier did well enough with his rifle and the major was cautious lest the gun break the blade in two.

Hamilton instantly became aware of his man. Roberts fought finely but without the spirit and finesse of a swordsman who had wagered his life many times upon his skill with the blade. There was a marked difference, Hamilton knew, between the man who knew how to fence and the man who knew how to fence and live. The latter breed had a creative spirit with the weapon and were not given to the mathematical gyrations of an instructor. "You fight," Hamilton said as he parried a thrust in *sixte* and countered with a *riposte* which fell short, "like an algebraic formula, if you will forgive my saying so. It is not just a matter of parrying and thrusting, my English dumpling. It is a thing of spirit, the fine work of a sword, like the smile of a pretty girl." He changed his attack into a *fleche* and forced Roberts slowly backward. "A smile is so illusive, sir, and a sword point should be the same."

"Major," Roberts said hoarsely. "Major, help me with him!"

If the major heard him, he made no reply. The major's sword was clanging against the barrel of the rifle and he was grunting in the attack. It was astonishing to see him handle his sword, for while Hamilton fenced with an Italian rapier, a sword for the thrusting kill, the major held a light sabre which he used for both edge and thrust. The soldier was hard-put, there was blood on his face already from where the sabre had reached his forehead in a lucky slash.

Hamilton saw it and hurried his own foe. He continued the running attack and pushed Roberts, finally, to the side of the road. "You see," he panted, effectively guarding his left side from the wild stab of the Englishman's lunge, "it is more than formula. One does not thrust at the body, or parry a thrust alone. There is more to it than that." They paused and their swords clung together, immobile for the split second. And he suddenly went on, executing the movements as he spoke, "There is the feint, so!" He lugged, pulled back quickly while Roberts was tricked into a parry at a blade that was no longer there. "And there is the thrust, so!" Roberts paled as the point flicked off his sword, almost too late and passed his *quinte*, glittering coldly. "And finally, sir, there is—" Hamilton stepped forward, feinted, came back, feinted again and then executed a brilliant cut-over which slid along the top of Robert's blade and pressed into his body below the heart. "Creation," finished Hamilton, "a thing of the spirit." He stepped back as Roberts, stiffening in a moan, dropped his sword, clutched his breast and slowly sagged down, his face falling upon his knees.

Hamilton wheeled, his rapier flexing freely. But the major had finished his business and sheathed his sword. When Hamilton saw him, the Englishman had mounted his horse. He stared at the ground, "What, Roberts? Dead?"

"You, too!" Hamilton cried hotly. "You haven't finished here, old blowhard! Get down and fight!"

"Someday, American, when I have no pressing business such as now," snarled the major, "I'll give myself the pleasure of carving out your heart and roasting it on a spit!"

"And I," Hamilton replied in cold fury, "will do the swamps an honor and return to it that croaky little frog you carry in your throat!"

The Englishman kicked his horse, rode straight for Hamilton, made one last desperate swipe at him with the sabre which he whipped out savagely, missed, and then rode off at top speed. The night swallowed the echoes of his horse's hoofbeats.

John Hamilton wiped the blood off his sword and put it back in its sheath. He saw the soldier lying on the road, his long rifle thrown clear of him. Hamilton ran over and knelt down beside the man. There were two ugly sable wounds on the head and face, but what had put him down was a stab in the left lung. Hamilton ripped open the buckskin and examined the wound in the moonlight, for the man still breathed.

"Nothin'," the soldier gasped. "A scratch."

"Yes," Hamilton said, quietly. "But a mortal scratch. It's small enough, my friend, and neat and clean. But deadly. What's your name?"

"Jeb—Callan," said the soldier. His breath came harder but he seemed to feel little pain. "Thank ye, Hamilton, thank ye—"

Hamilton started in surprise. "You know me?"

The soldier smiled slowly. "I didn' rec'nize ye till ye made ye purty speeches. An' then I knew was only one man could talk and fight thataway. John Hamilton, th' rogue o' th' Shenandoah—Ah . . ."

"Lie still."

"I guess I'm dyin'."

Hamilton shrugged. "I'm afraid you are, Jeb. He reached you."

"Hamilton, listen—"

"Yes?"

"In my buckskin, a sealed packet"—a pause then that was centuries long—"for Gen'ral Lafayette—important—"

"I understand," Hamilton said. "I'll see that someone gets it to him. In Richmond?"

The soldier sighed and did not reply. Hamilton got up, having felt the life ebb out of the man. He stood there a moment. It was that period of contemplation which was always disturbing, the fact that here was the evidence: only one can could win a duel. He never thought of that when he fought.

He stooped down, found the packet in the buckskin. The sword had run through it and it was bloody. He put it into his waistcoat, quickly mounted Bony who neighed nervously nearby, and then rode down the rest of Brattle Hill's slope where the candlelight of Lace Falls showed itself, placidly and cheerfully across the darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE WHISTLING OYSTER

THE good fortunes of Joseph Kilrain Fitzpatrick were proving almost too much for his gentle Irish soul. To the amazement of Marcel, the cook, Fitzie had danced a dexterous jig in the kitchen spilling a bottle of brandy which Marcel had been using to add life to a pie (and doubtless to invigorate his own stomach) and he had laughed away the wreckage of glass and waste of spirits with a grin which split his face from ear to ear. Fitzie's face was moonish anyway, and had an ever-present hue of scarlet which was the inevitable end of inn-keepers who joined their guests in too numerous toasts.

"Marcel, you jumping toad!" he exclaimed happily. "Do you realize it? Eight guests! Eight guests in one night at the Whistling Oyster! Such fortune overwhelms me! It has been months since we saw such trade!"

"*Monsieur,*" Marcel replied, sniffing, "of all the help of the Whistling Oyster, I, Marcel D'Antibe, should know that we have guests. Have I not sweated my hands to the bone with the pastries for the lot? Did not madame request for her *Russe Orientale* and did I not prepare it, me, Marcel, the only chef who could, on such notice, prepare a *Russe Orientale* in this country forgotten of God?"

Fitzie laughed and slapped his stomach and then wiped his hands on his apron. "Come, Frenchie," he said, "you're much too dour for a night like this. Cheer

up! Eight guests! It means pay in your pocket instead of a promise."

Marcel frowned. "But it is the money of Englishmen! *Par le bon Dieu,* mutton and tea! Have they no imagination, these English?"

Fitzie looked shocked. He moved to the cook and whispered, "Mind your words, Marcel! Would you lose yourself a life? They are a touchy lot, these British! They suspicion me already because I am an Irishman. Damn me this touch of brogue. I'd thought to lose it in these years away but they spotted it." Fitzie straightened into an imitation and went on, "So the polite one, they call him Lord Cartwright, he turns to me and says, 'Mine host has a touch of Killarney on his tongue, I see?' And the other one, Sir Gerald Mackey, he says, 'The Irish are a stupid race, Milord, and stubborn as these ragged Americans.' And then Lord Cartwright says to me, 'I ask you to drink a toast, mine host, to His Majesty Gearge III of England.'"

Marcel leaned forward, interested, "And you, *mon vieux?"*

A look of shame came across Fitzie's moon face. He gulped and answered, "I drank the toast and they laughed. What else could I do?"

The chef shrugged, disappointed. "You could have replied, *monsieur,* that while you presented the comforts of your inn to them, you could not present your soul to their puppet, even in a toast!"

Fitzie gasped in horror. "They'd have run me through!"

"But what a way to die! How magnificent!"

"There's a Frenchman for you," Fitzie said. "Now, where's Kathie? Where the devil is the girl?"

Marcel swept his hand toward the door. "Speak of the devil, and *voilà,* there she is!"

THE door swung open and Kathie—Katherine Fitzpatrick—came in, carrying a pewter tray. "Hello, Papa," she said. "They want more wine, the Englishmen. Will you kindly take it to them?"

Fitzie stared at the lovely woman who was his daughter, frowned slightly at the set of her mouth. She put the tray down wearily and went to the window. She could see nothing from that window but the stables in the rear of the inn. Her father knew that. But she looked out as though the world opened itself for her eyes. They were soft and lovely blue eyes, and her hair, neatly combed was black as a raven's wing. Her nose was pert and slightly pugged and her cheeks were bright. She was very pretty.

"I'm convinced of it," Fitzie groaned at length. "It's me that's mad here. Eight paying guests, be they English or Indian, and Marcel sniffs, and you, Kathie, you moon at a window! What is it, lass; has your old man offended your good tastes in some manner unknowing?"

"I'm all right, Papa," Kathie said absently.

"It's plain enough you're all right," Fitzie replied gingerly, "but your mind is on the moon. Lass, lass, we've guests outside who wait to be pleased. Don't hand them their bottle with the face of a Frenchman—"

"—a Russian," Marcel interrupted, waving a knife.

"—a sad, long face to make them hold their purse-strings tighter. Now, it's an amazing thing how a smile will bring a shilling into your hand."

Kathie came from the window, looking troubled. "Would you have me smile at that fop of a lord, Papa? He has already tried his gallantry on me." She frowned. "I hate him, both of them."

"Who the devil are they?" Marcel asked. "Arnold's raiders are not in this valley anymore. They've gone east with Cornwallis. It is of a strangeness that these Englishmen should come here. Are they soldiers?"

"No," Kathie said. "They appear not."

"Aha," Marcel said then. "They are spies, *non? L'espionage!"*

There arose outside in the courtyard of the Whistling Oyster a clatter of hooves

upon the rough stone cobbles which echoed sharply in the still night and brought Fitzie alert instantly. He threw up his hands quickly and roared. "Another one yet? Then it is nine we house tonight, instead of eight! Truly, my fortunes have turned! Quick Kathie, to the front!"

Kathie ran from the kitchen. She saw the two Englishmen sitting by the fire as she went past them in the outer room and made for the door. They whispered something to each other and laughed. Her face burned. She reached the big front door and swung it open, but the courtyard was empty, and outside Ancil Hofbrang, the stable boy, stood there dully.

"Ancil," she called, "was there a guest? We heard the horse."

"There was a man," Ancil replied, his teeth chattering a little. "H-h-he swept by here like Satan and all but brushed me d-d-down. He made for the st-stables."

Kathie looked puzzled. "But who was it?"

"I did not see his face."

"Well, go to the stables then and take his horse," she replied, annoyed with him. "Don't stand there in the chill and listen to the sound of your own teeth. Bring him to the door."

She closed the front door and returned quickly to the kitchen, avoiding the faces of the Englishmen in embarrassment. She opened the door and went in and was about to explain to her waiting father, when the rear door of the kitchen swung open, and a man strode in, slamming it shut behind him.

Fitzie looked at him and groaned loudly and put his hands to his head, rocking back and forth. "And only this minute I was saying that my fortunes had turned and that I had another paying guest—"

"And instead," John Hamilton replied, punching the innkeeper in the stomach and making him grunt, "you have received the locust of the Virginia valley, come to eat you out of house and home!"

THE worried frown disappeared from Kathie's lovely face at once. She stared at the big, raw-boned man with the light gray eyes that were smiling now as he crossed the room. Watching him, her own eyes were sparkling.

Hamilton swept to a chair opposite Marcel's table where the Frenchman stirred a meat sauce in a trance. "Fitzie, you buzzard!" Hamilton cried. "I am hungry! I am famished!"

Fitzie groaned. "The appetite of an elephant and the pocketbook of a beggar!"

"Listen to the usurer," Hamilton said, looking pained. "For seventy miles, I have dreamed of a beefsteak broiled as only the tender loving hands of Marcel D'Antibe, the most skillful chef in the Colonies, could broil it, and I arrive to hear insults!"

Marcel smiled happily. "He is wise like the owl, this one. Did you hear of what he said of me? Ah, *monsieur,* you shall have it, the finest steak we own, from the heart of Marcel!"

"And the pocketbook of Fitzpatrick!" Fitzie added. The innkeeper frowned at Hamilton and quickly moved to him. "What in the seven devils of Loch Ballyshannon are you doing back in Lace Falls so soon, lad? It was said here that you had gone off to Winchester to be wedded to the wealth of the Norwoods. Today is the second, by good glory, today was the day of the marriage! You have not married and brought your bride all the way from Winchester—on your wedding night—to taste a steak in the Whistlong Oyster?"

Hamilton shook his head politely. "Fitzie, you are impertinent. There is no bride. There will be no bride. I doubt if Miss Anne Norwood will ever stand the mention of my name again without making a sour face. I affect some people that way. . . . Lord save my heart!" he burst out suddenly, "what lovely star is that by yonder door? It puts the moon to shame. Kathie!"

Kathie curtsied by the door and stood there trembling.

"What?" Hamilton said. "A curtsy only? No hand to kiss?"

"My hand is rough," said Kathie, flushing. "A gentleman would not want it."

"Your hand," replied Hamilton severely, "is like the silk of India. And since when have I been known as a gentleman?"

"He is mad," Fitzie groaned, shaking his head. "He is unpredictable!"

THERE were voices suddenly from the outer room and Kathie put her hands quickly to her mouth in alarm. "The wine," she said. "They wanted more wine."

"Take it to them, Fitzie," Hamilton said. "Kathie, come and let me see you."

Fitzie groaned again and snatched the key to the wine-cellar from his belt. "Ah," he moaned as he went out, "I have a pain in my leg and it means evil. . . . Coming, sirs, coming!"

Hamilton frowned at the voices in the other room. "They're noisy beggars," he said. "Who are they?"

"They are English," Marcel said in disgust.

"English?" Hamilton exclaimed. "Good! I'll kill them all!"

"But first," said Kathie, touching her hand to his face to hold him down, "first you'll eat?"

Hamilton laughed. "First I'll eat. Don't be a sluggard with your victuals, Marcel. Ah, Kathie, you look more beautiful than ever! Why, you've changed, Kathie. You're a woman. It's amazing, the change."

"You're teasing," Kathie said quietly. "It's been but four days since you last saw me. . . ."

"Four days, my dear, can last an eternity. Men are slow to progress, but women! Who knows what strides a girl may make in four days! Did you miss me?"

"I did," she said. She blushed, but Hamilton waved a hand and said, "Don't mind Marcel, he is a Frenchman."

She turned without warning and flounced out of the room to leave Hamilton sitting at the table, completely nonplussed. He turned, scowling, and looked at Marcel. "What did I do? Did I offend her?"

"No," said Marcel, trying to look interested in his sauce.

"I was only joking. I meant no offense to Kathie. I would hurt Kathie less than anyone else I know, except one, perhaps."

"Ah!" said Marcel. "That one though. It is the catch, *non?*"

Hamilton stood up and walked over to the chef. "Marcel, you know more than you say. It is not like a Frenchman to be so secretive. What is wrong with her?"

"Why, *monsieur,* it is so plain and you are very stupid that you do not see. She is in love with you."

"In love with me? Kathie?" Hamilton looked sober a moment and then roared with laughter. "She couldn't, Marcel! Not with me? She's known me too long and too well."

"It is the truth, *monsieur.*"

"You are wrong, Marcel."

"*Si vous dites,*" Marcel shrugged. "I have not often failed in the reading of a woman's eyes. I have been married three times."

"But—well—she's only a child, Marcel, a child!"

"To you perhaps. But she is a woman. She is a desirable woman, *monsieur.* You have only to watch the owl-eyed Englishmen outside moon after her and hope."

"They do that?" Hamilton's voice was terrible.

Marcel looked surprised. "Would you fight them, *monsieur?* Surely it is no crime. She is lovely. A lovely woman was made to be admired, not to be laughed at. If you will take your seat again, this piece of beef is ready for your teeth."

Hamilton sat down without speaking and ate his dinner thoughtfully, while Kathie bustled about.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING'S MEN

IT WAS the duty of a spy in the Intelligence of His Majesty King George of England to proceed with caution, act with daring, and retreat with secrecy and dispatch. A good spy was the one who did not get caught and hanged. The bad spy, though undoubtedly romanticized and made famous by his very seizure, did not live long. Being a bad spy was being unhealthy. A good spy knew when to avoid combat.

It could be said of Major Rolph Caxton that he was a good spy. He had followed the orders of his superiors, almost to the letter. It was only the bad luck of John Hamilton's appearance at the fight on Brattle Hill which had spoiled the intrigue. Even Major Caxton had been a good spy. It was not that he had been afraid of Hamilton's sword, for as a swordman, Caxton rated with the finest.

When Major Caxton rode off from Brattle Hill on his "pressing business" he reached the summit and then remained close to it on the other side out of Hamilton's sight. He dismounted there, holding his horse, and he watched what Hamilton would do with the body of Jeb Callan, the militia man. Presently, he saw Hamilton mount and ride off.

Caxton was a morose and silent sort of man. He accepted the interruption grimly. Now, just as grimly, he remounted and returned to the scene of the fight. He found Callan quite dead and already growing cold. He searched the Virginian quickly, but the papers were gone. "Damme damme," Caxton grunted. "The American has taken them."

It meant more work. He rode off quickly on the trail of John Hamilton toward Lace Falls. He managed to keep the flying figure of Hamilton barely in sight until Hamilton reached the main street of the town. There among the avenues and alleys, Hamilton disappeared.

Caxton reached Gage Street at length and met the sign of the Whistling Oyster. He did not ride noisily into the courtyard where his horse might sound an entry on the rough cobbles. Instead, he dismounted in the road outside and tied his horse to the front gate. Then he went into the inn without knocking.

In the great room before the warm and blazing fire which spoke in a voice of crackling wood and hissing sap, Major Caxton found his officers, bogged down in the comfort of a clay pipe and a bottle of amber Barsac. Lord Peter Cartwright was the elder of the two, his gray hair hid neatly beneath a powdered white wig. His nose was huge and his eyes watery, but withal he had once been a handsome fellow, with a handsomeness born of striking homeliness. He knew the Continent as well as any Englishman, and it was to his credit that he had seen active service in the French wars as a general.

His companion, Sir Gerald Mackey, was, on the contrary, a fiery and brash sort of fellow, outspoken and savage at times, leanly good-looking and dressed always in the laced finery which bespoke a gentleman in London and a fop in Virginia. At the moment, he was holding the hand of Kathie and trying to impress upon her what a dashing fellow he was.

It was this grouping which Major Rolph Caxton came upon when he shut the front door.

LORD CARTWRIGHT heard the door and turned slightly. He was less interested in Kathie than Sir Gerald: his age had lent him an appreciation of feminine beauty which was entirely a matter of spirit. "Major!" he said then. "Come in!"

Major Caxton walked to them and nodded. He stared at the girl and then motioned at her. "Alone, Milords."

"Oh, come now," said Mackey. "Nothing you can say is more important than a pretty girl's hand."

"Pardon me," Kathie cried, snatching

her hand away and thankful for the opportunity to flee. "I'm sure my papa wants me."

She ran off and disappeared into the kitchen.

Lord Cartwright frowned at Caxton. "You have a look upon your face, Major, that I do not like. Nothing went wrong?"

"Everything went wrong," said Major Caxton.

"Where is Roberts?" Sir Gerald asked suddenly, glancing around. "You left him outside?"

"Outside," replied Caxton grimly, "on his face at Brattle Hill. Roberts is dead, Milord. Run through. It was going well enough until a madman arrived. He challenged us and Roberts engaged him while I took the Colonial. Roberts met a better man—"

"And the messenger? Morgan's messenger?"

"Dead too," said Caxton. "I reached him well enough. But I could not get his papers without engaging the American madman. I thought it would be safer to draw him off than engage him, so I rode off, watched from the top of the hill and then returned when the American left."

"And the papers?"

"Gone, Milord. The American took them. I followed him to Lace Falls. He is here, somewhere in this town. We have not lost him yet. Doubtless he will spend the night here. In the morning, if we post men at the four roads, we will meet him surely and regain the sheaf. I would not forget his face—" Caxton stopped speaking as Fitzie left the kitchen, swinging the door open wide and revealing John Hamilton eating away at the kitchen table. Caxton had a mere glimpse, but he paled.

"More wine, sirs?" Fitzie asked, rubbing his hands. "Perhaps a bite to eat, some chocolate?"

"Get out of here!" Sir Gerald Mackey said. "Leave us alone!"

"Wait!" Major Caxton cried sharply. "Milords, he is here!"

THE announcement electrified them. They sat erect, eyes bright suddenly. "You," Caxton told the inn-keeper. "That fellow in the kitchen—the raw-boned man —who is he?"

"Why, Milords," Fitzie said fearfully, "he is John Hamilton of this township, Milords. A harmless lad who jokes and jests but means no wrong."

"Hamilton?" Major Caxton said.

"He is related to Mr. Titus Hamilton of the Scarsta plantation here?" Lord Cartwright said quietly.

"Yes, Milord," said Fitzie. "He is the youngest son of the Hamiltons. Mr. Titus is his brother. Gentlemen, he has meant no wrong. I hope he has not offended you."

"He is the youngest," Lord Cartwright said. "Titus spoke of him, Gerald. The wild one."

Fitzie said, "If it will please you, sirs, I will turn him out and send him on his way—"

"Inn-keeper!" Sir Gerald snapped. "Mind your tongue!"

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Lord Cartwright, smiling disarmingly. "He has not offended us. Mine host, put this through your Irish head and mull it there. We would like Mr. Hamilton to remain. You will put him up here for the night; you will not tell him that we asked for him; you will forget anything which has just been said. But you will see that he remains here tonight, under pain of death."

"If he suspects a thing," said Sir Gerald, "you'll feel the taste of steel in your belly, old buzzard!"

"Please, sirs," Fitzie said in terror, "I will say nothing. I promise he will stay. But this is a respectable inn. There must be no violence—"

"I promise you," said Lord Cartwright "that your friend will not suffer at our hands. Now mind your tongue. You've been warned. And for your cooperation, mine host—" He tossed Fitzie a few guineas, and Fitzie, first paled, then flushed at the sight of the money, bowed

himself out with uncommonly good grace.

"If Milords will forgive my saying so," Major Caxton remarked evenly, "I see no point in delaying matters. The lad has the papers on him. It would be simple enough to step in and take them."

"With the sword he wears and the manner in which he uses it, made so descriptive by you yourself, Major?" Lord Cartwright asked drily.

"Pshaw, man," said Sir Gerald hotly. "You credit the man with too much. If Caxton is afraid to engage the fellow, allow me to!"

"My dear Mackey," replied Lord Cartwright with ease, "if anyone could engage the man, I'm sure Major Caxton could. Caxton is not, as you put it badly, afraid of the man. Caxton is merely wise not to risk meeting a better man. I'll wager the chap would run Mackey through with ease, eh, Caxton?"

"He is fast with the blade," Caxton said. "The point goes about you like a wasp. I have respect for his blade, sirs, I am not afraid of it. Indeed, when this business is finished, I have a score to settle with that young man and I will do it over a hilt. But I am afraid, Sir Gerald, he would be too much for you."

"Damme," Mackey cried, "you're insolent, Major."

"And you," soothed Cartwright, "are acting like a popinjay, Gerald. Caxton speaks only the truth. Do you fancy yourself *his* equal with a sword?"

"No," said Mackey. "I admit the major is the better."

"Then be reasonable. You had a plan, Major?"

"To see yon lad with a pistol instead of a sword and demand the papers and then be off to New York. One does not argue with a pistol."

"And yet he might," said Lord Cartwright. "From what I have heard of John Hamilton, he is a shade too reckless. You might be forced to shoot him."

"Even so—"

"No. Not even so. He must not be harmed. I remind you both that Titus Hamilton is a solid Tory. He has opened his plantation, Scarsta, to us, with all its granary and supply. This Hamilton family has been strong in London, it is known to the Crown. We cannot take such a chance. No, my friends, there is a better way, a surer way."

"And that?" Major Caxton asked dubiously.

"La Tournada," said Lord Cartwright.

Major Caxton gasped, and paled a bit. "La Tournada! She is here?"

Lord Cartwright smiled. "She is here. That satisfies you, Major?"

Major Caxton nodded grimly and smiled too. "That satisfies me, Milord, completely."

"NO, NO, Papa," Kathie said, looking horrified at the proposal. "How do you think of such a thing! He cannot remain here tonight. John, you must not. You have come all the way from Winchester and you should be home. If you are not to be married, your brother should hear of it from you first!"

"Kathie," Hamilton sighed, "how you must hate me—"

"I hate you?" she said in greater horror. "That is not true!"

"But you want me to go away from here, from you and the inn. You want me to go home to my bore of a brother!"

"It is only that he will be furious if you do not," Kathie cried. "Suppose he learns of the—John, I don't know what happened at Winchester, but when he finds it out, they may say awful things."

"Kate!" Fitzie snapped. "Your own business, lass. Mind to it. I've tendered the rogue an invitation for the night and it's none of your affair. The trouble with this freedom for which men fight so dear is that the lasses take advantage of a man's place. There was a time when a father's word was law. I tell you, lass, none of your affair."

"But then," Hamilton remarked, frowning slightly, "it is *my* affair, is it not, Fitzie? You are well aware that I own but a single pound which I have eaten

through this brief hour. You are then aware that I cannot pay my board."

"Out of friendship for you," Fitzie bowed, "I give you a bed for the night that you may think up a perfect lie to tell your brother Titus in the morning."

Hamilton roared. "Very well, Fitzie. I'll sleep in one of your wretched beds. I have no wish to see the storm cloud my brother wears for a face, at least not tonight. I would much prefer the company of your burgundy, and"—he blew a kiss from his lips to the ceiling—"your lovely daughter."

"I'll have no part of it," Kathie said. "You should be at your own home, John Hamilton. And I'll not bow to your flattery either when one has as glib a tongue as you. Good night!" she went out, held her head up and her lips compressed tightly. They stared after her.

"Now there's a surly girl tonight," said Fitzie.

Hamilton looked disturbed. "I keep offending her."

"You imagine it," said Fitzie. "You're tired, that's all. You'd best be abed yourself, lad. There'll be explaining to do tomorrow."

That was true enough. Titus Hamilton was still to be reckoned with. Titus held the purse strings, was master of the Hamilton destinies since the death of the parents who rested now in comfortable Tory graves. And the Hamilton destinies had, at one time, been more than great. There was a time when they said that if you went to Lace Falls, you went to the Hamiltons. That was back in 1736 when Joshua Hamilton received his grant from the king. How grandpa Joshua would have raged now, John Hamilton mused as he allowed Fitzie to lead him upstairs to his room. Two sons and not a one married, no heirs, nothing. The blood had thinned. It would have been disgrace to Joshua Hamilton who sired fourteen children. Still, Joshua could have handled John. They were much alike.

"Here's your door," Fitzie said, "and don't be breaking in my furniture in your nightmares."

"You see that Bony is all right, Fitzie. Tell Ancil."

HAMILTON accepted the candle from the inn-keeper, opened his door and went in. From the warmth of the fire to the chill cold of the room caused Hamilton to shiver a little.

"John Hamilton."

It was only a whisper but it gave him a turn. He came around with his rapier half out, and in the candlelight he made out Kathie behind the door. "Lord," he said. "You're a surprising creature, Kathie."

"I didn't mean to startle you," she whispered. "I—I wanted to say good night and tell you I was sorry."

Hamilton pulled her to him and raised her chin. "Why is it that you bark at me one moment, Kate, and are so tender in the next?"

"Perhaps because I am a woman."

"Are women that unstable?"

"When they have cause. Why do you look at me that way?"

Hamilton smiled. "Because you are very pretty, Kate." He suddenly stooped a little and kissed her. She threw her arms around him and held him close. He kissed her again and then smiled. "You'd best leave now, Kathie, while you can."

"I love you, John."

Hamilton patted her cheek and frowned. "Hurry out now, my dear, and don't be seen."

"I'd rather—I'd rather stay."

Hamilton chuckled. "You're a brazen little thing. Out you go." And then in dead sober tones, "No Kate. You're much too good for a scuttle like me, and I'm far to fond of you to take advantage of your infatuation."

"What you mean," Kathie said, her voice very still, "is that you don't love me."

Hamilton shrugged, but remained silent.

"You still think of Anne Norwood, John?"

"Yes, I still do."

"Is she pretty?"

Hamilton sighed and went to the window. He looked out, let the yellow moonlight fall upon his face. "Pretty? She is more than that, Kathie. To have looked upon her smile is to have looked upon perfection. Her eyes put the beauty of the starlight to shame, before her face the moon hides itself. She is grace and beauty and splendor. The streets of God in all their golden wonder would dull and tarnish beneath the touch of her dainty foot!"

"How you must love her," Kathie whispered sadly.

"But her soul—"

"Her soul?"

"Her soul is a block of ice, frozen with the cold of haughtiness, an ugly soul which lives by the word of convention, which can harbor hate and prejudice. There is nothing about her soul that you should envy, Kate; your own is the sun himself compared to hers. Now will you go?"

"John," Kathie asked, timidly, "what happened?"

"Why," he said, "it was simple enough. Mr. Norwood proposed a toast to his Majesty King George. Whereupon I said, ardently perhaps, that I preferred we make it George Washington instead. Whereupon young Norwood, his name George too, declared I had insulted his house. (He has never liked me in the least.) Whereupon I told him that he was a whippersnapper, and then he called me a scut, and I called him a scrogue and he slapped my face and I ran him through."

Kathie cried out in horror.

"As simple as that," John Hamilton smiled. "And then, Kate, my sweet, what do you think Mr. Norwood the elder proposed?"

"That they hang you!"

"No—shoot. He went for his pistol."

"John!"

"And what do you think my betrothed did in such an emergency, my lovely Anne who was going to wed me for a period of time we have come to assume as the duration of life. What did she do?"

Kathie breathed, "She tried to go with you, but her father stopped her."

Hamilton laughed bitterly. "No, Kate. You are telling me what *you* would have done. Miss Anne requested that I remove myself, more or less permanently from her sight; she insinuated that I was rank American scum; she hoped that I would be hanged without much ado; and she swore that she would do everything in her power to see me dead when, as, and if she ever met me again."

"She was angry, John," said Kathie. "She did not mean those things. She felt you had humiliated her. You will see."

"Ah yes," Hamilton said quietly, "she had a lovely soul. Good night, Kathie, good night. . . ."

CHAPTER V

FAIR IN WAR

IN THE small hours of the morning, it was black dark throughout the Virginia hills and the mists of the mountains came down and filtered through the streets of Lace Falls like creeping things, white and formless. The air was more than chill now: a sodden raw dampness filled it and laid upon its breath a cutting edge of cold which made John Hamilton, asleep in the feather bed with a ponderous quilt over his body, draw up his knees into his stomach at the startling touch of the cold sheet beyond where his body had warmed it.

He had not slept well at all; he had tossed restlessly deep in the depths of the feather mattress where one falls away into an abyss of comfort and never quite stops falling or reaches bottom.

Once or twice Hamilton awoke slightly, fancied he heard the sound of voices, deep hoarse voices of men, plotting in the next room. Then, later, the sound

of a stage's wheels upon the rough cobbles of the courtyard of the Whistling Oyster, and the noisy snorting of a pair of horses, but the lure of sleep was stronger and he returned to it.

It was near dawn, a black-dark dawn when life was at its lowest ebb that John Hamilton awoke.

He awoke to find he was sweating and that his heart beat very fast and that he was panting. He frowned at this strange excitement in his body and wondered if some bad dream had brought him to. He could remember no dream. Dimly, in the dark, he remembered a cry of anguish but it was gone now and the inn lay silent under the night.

Nevertheless he sat up. Even as he did so, he heard the cry again. It was real. It was no dream. The voice of a woman—in the very next room. There was anguish and horror in it and it turned his heart cold inside him.

He sprang out of bed and whipped his rapier out of his scabbard and dashed into the hall. The door of the room next to his was slightly ajar and he ran in. The room was dark, the moon had faded, but a lone candle burned there, quivering in the air where a pale white hand held it up, trembling.

Hamilton stared, then gasped. He saw a woman of thirty in the bed, her hair long and golden, her face exquisitely carved. She was a gorgeous creature, pale as death and polished as gold. The silken negligee she wore did not conceal her figure, and her breasts rose and fell beneath the lace as she panted in terror. She did not try to pull the sheet up to her to conceal herself, so panicked was she.

"Madame," Hamilton said quickly, "forgive this bold intrusion but I heard you cry out!"

"Thank God you did!" she cried to him. "There was man—at my window. He held a dagger. He meant to have my life!"

"Lie still," Hamilton snapped. He sprang to the window and threw open the shutters, his sword alive and ready. But the projection of a roof outside the window showed no human being and the courtyard below was empty, save for a skulking tomcat who slunk across the dark stables. There were whispers in the night as the wind came down through the dogwood trees.

Hamilton said, disappointed, "There is no one."

"He was there," the lady said, still frightened. "A moment ago. I saw his dagger."

"What did he look like?"

"I could not see. His face was dark. He may have worn a mask. I saw the bulk of him at the window with the dagger in his hand."

"But these shutters were closed," Hamilton said, scowling.

"He went back, shutting them when I saw him and screamed," she said. "You are sure he has gone?"

"There's no mortal out here now," Hamilton said.

HE CLOSED the shutters and returned to the bed. He drank in the sight of her, excited in her presence. "Permit me, madame. I am John Hamilton. I live in Lace Falls."

"I thank you, sir," she said.

"And you are?"

"My name is Edith Desmond," she replied.

"You are married," Hamilton said.

"No."

Hamilton raised his eyebrows and smiled. "So? But you did not object when I called you madame."

"Are you then, a sharp man?" Edith Desmond asked, looking at him warily. She smiled slowly. "No, you're not. But you're a very pleasant man. The truth is, I have been married but at the moment I am a widow. I am very grateful to you, Mr. Hamilton, for the loan of your sword."

"A pity," he grumbled, "that I did not have the chance to use it." He looked at her with warm eyes and smiled.

"I'll say this: I never was called to defend a fairer lady than you."

"La!" she cried. "You're a glib fellow."

"It's the truth. Why would any one want to dagger you, I ask that?"

She shivered and glanced at the shutters again. "I do not know. But perhaps I do—I can't tell you, my young friend. These are perilous times, and death is common enough."

"You speak," put in Hamilton critically, "as though you were quite aware of your intended assailant."

"I may be."

"I ask his name," said Hamilton, "to do myself the honor of remembering it and remembering him some day when we might chance to meet, for your sake."

She laughed softly and Hamilton felt a tingle down his back at his closeness to such exotic beauty. "You are a romantic," she said quietly. "You are, I see, an incurable romantic. Withal, a remarkable young man. Here in a lady's boudoir, you stand in a nightshirt, quite at ease, ready for a duel for the sake of a lady whom you know but ever so slightly. Only a romantic could be so poised."

Hamilton smiled broadly. "That may be true. I will not deny that I am quite at home in a lady's boudoir. It is a failing of mine which I cherish dearly. But surely, Edith—I shall call you Edith, with or without your permission—surely, we know each other more than slightly. In these few moments, I know you very well."

"And hope to know me better?"

"Intimately," said Hamilton boldly.

Her eyes flashed. "You are insolent and impertinent and insulting—" They cooled quickly and she could not repress a sparkle in them, "—and charming."

"And the name of the man at the window?" Hamilton asked, with a slight bow.

"We will forget him."

"As you say."

"We will forget everything," Edith Desmond went on. "This adventure, you, I, all about it. Perhaps it would be best that way. You heard a cry, a woman had a bad dream, you dashed in, she recovered. In the morning she went on her way, and you yours, and *voilà!*"

Hamilton sighed and shook his head. "Easier said than done, my dear. You are not easily forgotten."

"Then you may remember me." She gave him her white hand and Hamilton kissed it gracefully. She laughed. "You are so ridiculous with your fine manners. The nightshirt does not go with the kissing of a hand."

"I confess it leaves me at a loss, this costume," Hamilton said. "And so I shall retire, with your permission, and wait to look upon you in the morning."

He bowed and walked for the door but he had barely reached it when she called, "Hamilton!"

"Madame?" he said, pausing.

"Hamilton, I am frightened again. It is easy to laugh when you are here, but when you go, the shadows menace me once more. I will tell you, I must tell some one. The man at the window—"

Hamilton strode back. "Tell me," he commanded, frowning.

"THERE is one called La Tournada," she whispered. "He is a spy in the pay of Britain. He is dreaded and feared. He stops at nothing in his quests. He gets his very name from the way he kills. La Tournada. It means 'he who stabs and twists the dagger' in the killing."

"How do you know all this?" Hamilton exclaimed, surprised.

"I cannot tell you that."

"But if this La Tournada wants your life, then you yourself must be an agent, a Colonial agent!"

"No, no, do not speak so loud. I cannot say."

"Tell me!"

"I cannot."

"Then I will go," Hamilton said.

"Please do not," Edith Desmond cried,

her eyes quickly touched with the mist of tears. "I cannot tell you. It is something which does not concern you. It is my own affair. Please understand."

Hamilton shrugged. "Very well."

She smiled again. "Sit there at the foot of the bed and talk with me, Hamilton. It will soon be daybreak."

"Too soon," Hamilton replied deeply, leaning forward. He stared at her and his breath came harder. "A man can last but so long, my dear. You are very lovely."

She whispered, "Now talk to me."

"Of what?"

"There are so many things a man and woman can talk about. There is the weather—"

"Dull."

"There is the war—"

"Grim," said Hamilton.

"There is love—"

"Ah," Hamilton said, moving closer to her.

She leaned back, her mouth opened slightly. "Tell me about love then, Hamilton."

"Love is a spark," Hamilton said. "It means so many things. It means the marriage which lasts your lifetime, it means the adoration of a dog for his master, it is sometimes spontaneous, and often convenient. It is eternity and it is also the split-second, the impassioned and romantic moment—" He stared at her as she watched him, her bosom rising and falling faster than it should have, and suddenly Hamilton put aside his sword and went swiftly to her and bent over her. She did not try to stop him as he kissed her, and at the pressure of his lips, she put her arms around his neck. When he broke and raised his face a trifle, she whispered, "You spoke of love. What am I in this category of love which you expound?"

"You," Hamilton whispered in reply, "are the last—the romantic moment, here for a night, and a memory for the rest of time."

"Ah . . ." she sighed.

She tightened her arms and pulled his face down to her own. . . .

WITH the dawn showing red in the eastern sky, Lady Desmond began to dress hurriedly in her room. The whole thing had been a plot, certainly, and yet as she thought of Hamilton's lean face, she smiled gently.

Her door squeaked gently then, and she turned to face it. She did not see the face at the door, but the voice was that of a frog, husky and tentative.

"Coming," she called. "Be still."

Major Rolph Caxton waited for her outside the door. As she came out, he took her arm. "Did you get them?"

"I did," said Major Caxton. He smiled, showing a full-toothed mouth. "It was really very simple, Milady. I must confess that I have acquired great respect for victory by—shall we say—charm?"

Lady Desmond regarded him coldly. "Major, our association is one of duty, not of choice. Your dubious compliments act upon me much in the manner of your ill-mannered insults."

They went outside. A coach waited, with four horses bridled and ready for the road. Ancil, the stable-boy, held the leaders' heads. Lord Cartwright and Sir Gerald Mackey, both in robes of undress, stood outside the door. "Well done, my dear," Lord Cartwright said quietly. "You are to go on to New York now and deliver this sheaf to General Howe. We have read the orders, but they are in code."

"But I thought I was to go to Richmond," Edith Desmond said, showing some surprise.

"I have changed that plan," Lord Cartwright said. "Mackey and I will go on to Richmond. Caxton will accompany you as far as Pennsylvania and then return to meet us in Richmond. Meanwhile, this sheaf must get to Howe. These orders are from General Washington himself. They were meant for Lafayette. It is possible that Washington means to strike south and lay siege to Lord Cornwallis

before the fleet reached Yorktown with supplies and reenforcements. Howe can decode these orders. We cannot. It is essential they reach him. If he can learn the old Fox's plans, there may be a decisive battle in New Jersey along the line of march and then Cornwallis and Arnold may come out of Yorktown and blast Lafayette's army to bits and the war is done."

"And the French?" Lady Desmond asked. "Have you news of the French fleet?"

"En route from the West Indies," said Lord Cartwright. "Admiral Hood has gone to engage De Grasse before he reaches the Chesapeake and unites with the remainder of his ships of the line. It is the chance to break the back of the Colonial cause, Milady, if we act with urgency. But General Howe must know Washington's plans as soon as possible!"

"Trust me," said Lady Desmond. "I will travel as fast as I decently can."

"Decently?" coughed Major Caxton. "That will be a nice change for you, Milady."

Lady Desmond whirled and laid her hand across Caxton's face, leaving a red welt there and sounding a crack which was plainly audible. Simultaneously there burst from a window on the second floor of the Whistling Oyster a crack of thunder, a voice of doom, loud and savage and terrible. Cartwright and Mackey instantly ducked into the inn and out of sight, while the voice roared, "It is he! My frog of Brattle Hill! This time, my white-feathered frog, you do not escape me! Stand and let me see the sheen of your sword! Ah, by bearded Jupiter, I have a score to set on you and what a lovely dawn to set it in!"

They looked up, pale and startled. On the threshold of Milady's window stood John Hamilton, resplendent in a white nightshirt, his bare feet clinging to the window sill, his Italian rapier waving dangerously in his hand, a look of murder upon his intent face. . . .

HAMILTON did not sleep. He dozed now and then, but he was restless. The lady in the adjoining room occupied his mind, and a tantalizing scent of jasmine, which had clung to her somehow, heady and sharp, still dogged his nostrils. He tossed to and fro and soon had the bed a lumpy mass with a giant hole in the feather mattress where his body reposed.

Once he rose, feeling perhaps that the chill of the night air upon his body might make the warmth of his blankets so much the more desirable when he returned to them. But it was useless. He could not sleep.

He thought perhaps he was excited, but while that might have been the case when he returned to his own room, it was not the case now. Rather, it was a gnawing intuitive feeling that all was not well. Something was amiss. He felt it distinctly, tangibly.

It was very late when he finally closed his eyes, and he must have dozed for he awakened suddenly startled. He fancied he had heard sounds, of someone moving in that adjoining room. He got up and listened, but heard nothing. He returned to the bed, feeling jumpy and foolish.

But then he heard it again, heels upon the wooden planks which passed for floor at the Whistling Oyster. She was up. No doubt of it now. But still, was it not her own decision?

The sight of dawn soon disturbed him. It was an ungodly hour for anyone in the world to be up and about. It was an unheard-of hour for a lady to march abroad.

Hamilton threw back the quilts and leaped from the bed. The planks of the floor on his bare feet were cold. He started to reach for his sword and then abruptly he stopped and stood staring around the room. His clothes were gone. The cloak lay across the chair, but his waistcoat and his breeches and his shoes had vanished.

"Callan's papers!" Hamilton cried. "Gone, too; so that's the rub!"

The sound of horses' hooves stomping hollowly upon the cobble-stones reached him. He donned his belt with its cluster of weapons, put on his tri-cocked hat and threw his black cape over his shoulders, then dashed to the window and looked out.

He did not see Lord Cartwright and Sir Gerald Mackey. They stood in the seclusion of the inn door beneath his window. But he saw Lady Edith Desmond sitting in the coach, and he saw Major Rolph Caxton at its door. "She's hoodwinked me," Hamilton muttered, and strained to hear what the two were saying. Then swiftly Edith Desmond slapped the major's face. It was all that Hamilton needed.

He leaped to the window sill and called down to them in a voice of terrible wrath. He saw Edith Desmond disappear into the coach as though pulled back. Major Rolph Caxton, startled, paled and leaped to a seat above with the coachman. "Drive, fool!" Caxton roared. "Strike the horses and be away from this place!"

HAMILTON jumped. It was fifteen feet to the cobbles and his feet were bare. They stung with pain when he struck and he collapsed himself to take the weight of the fall off them. But he was up in an instant and he charged the coach with his sword, chill and glittery, waving madly to and fro.

Caxton uttered an oath and pulled his sabre free. He struck at the extended rapier and knocked it down. Then the blade came back at him along with Hamilton's voice, "Come down, coward! Come down and match my steel! This time you'll not escape!"

From the inside of the coach came Edith Desmond's voice, "Do not hurt him, Caxton! He must not be harmed!"

"Damme," Caxton grunted, striking hard at Hamilton's sword from the top of the coach. "In all this unharming of this churl, no one gives a thought to my own carcass!" He had an idea, and gripping his pistol in his left hand he turned it, holding the barrel so that he could club with the stock. Then he raised his sabre and sheathed it and cried, "Wait, American!"

"Draw," said Hamilton.

"I cannot fight," the major said, "with a man in a nightshirt. If I kill you, they will say it was an unfair fight. If you kill me, I will be made too ridiculous."

"I've had enough of your excuses!" Hamilton snapped. "I warn you to draw, sir. Madame! Edith, you may leave the coach!" He turned his head to help her out and at the same moment, when Hamilton's eyes twitched away from him for that split second, Major Caxton swung his pistol. The stock caught Hamilton high on the head. He stiffened, moaned dully and then collapsed in the courtyard upon the cold cobblestones, and Caxton laid the whip to the horses, the coach thundering off into Gage Street and then north on the pike for Winchester.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Rogue

By RICHARD SALE

Begin now this exciting story of a red-headed Virginian who helped to take his country from the King

IN the summer of 1781 there was a time of breathless pause in the Revolution. Howe and Cornwallis held their troops inactive, waiting to discover the next move of the rebel Washington. The future of a nation depended on the plans of that master strategist, called by the enemy the Old Fox. . . .

Riding down a highroad of Virginia, John Hamilton, the Rogue of the Shenandoah, had much to occupy his mind. By then he should have been the husband of Miss Anne Norwood—but the small matter of a duel with the bride's brother had made that impossible. For John Hamilton was devoted wholeheartedly to the Colonial cause, and the Norwoods, like his brother Titus, were Tories.

The ring of swordblades drew Hamilton from the highway. Some minutes later he was bending over a dying Colonial, while the hoofbeats of a British major's horse faded in the distance. But before the wounded man died he intrusted to John Hamilton a sealed packet, the message from Washington to Lafayette.

HAMILTON reached the inn called The Whistling Oyster only a short time before the arrival of a certain Major Caxton, the same British major who had fled from Hamilton after that roadside duel. But Hamilton's business was in the kitchen with Inn-keeper Fitzpatrick and his pretty daughter Kathie, while Caxton reported to two British noblemen in the front parlor. These were important servants of the King, and to them Caxton, an Intelligence Officer, told the story of the duel, of how a red-headed giant must now possess the sealed packet they all sought. They were talking of that when, through an open door, Caxton caught sight of the selfsame red-headed giant. . . . The plan to recover the dispatches was easily made, for La Tournada, a beautiful British spy, had just arrived at the inn.

That night John Hamilton was awakened by a woman's scream from the next room. His gallantry won him the company of a charming lady who called herself Edith Desmond—but the next morning Hamilton discovered that his clothes had been stolen—and also the dispatch for Lafayette. A moment later from his window he saw the beautiful and treacherous Edith Desmond about to enter a coach, escorted by none other than the British major John Hamilton had driven from the Colonial messenger. So, briefly clad, the rogue of the Shenandoah leaped down to intercept them, only to be knocked senseless by Caxton's gun-butt. . . .

CHAPTER VI

A ROGUE DISOWNED

IT WAS the brandy that roused John Hamilton. It coursed in his throat like white fire, and he swallowed it choking a little. Then he sat up to stare into

This story began in last week's Argosy

the haggard red face of Joseph Kilrain Fitzpatrick who held in his hand a bottle. Dazed for the moment, and chilled to the marrow, Hamilton permitted himself another gulp, and looked around. He saw Ancil, the stable-boy, watching him stupidly. He was in the stables, the smell of them assured him that. He was on the floor in a bed of hay and some had gotten up under the nightshirt and was tickling his back. The brandy fired him with strength and warmth and he sat erect. "The coach!" he exclaimed thickly, his mouth disinclined to work right. "My Brattle Hill frog! Milady Desmond!"

"All gone, all gone," Fitzie said back. "Glory, lad, what means all this? Cavorting in a public place in your nightshirt, engaging in a duel without your pants, being struck down on the cobbles lacking shoes! Have you gone mad? What will people say? Pray that no one saw you! If your brother Titus should hear of this —what means it all?"

"I ask you that," Hamilton groaned, feeling the lump on his head with an expression of pain. "There is an egg upon my skull that no chicken laid I warrant. I ask you, Fitzie, what happened?"

"Don't ask me," Fitzie snapped. "I can't reply. I was in the kitchen with Marcel, cooking breakfast for my guests when Ancil came running and said you lay low on the cobbles. What a scandal!"

Hamilton groaned again and beckoned Ancil over. The stable boy had the face of an owl and the wit of an ostrich. "You," Hamilton said soberly. "Pull your mind together, Ancil. You say you saw it. Who did what to me? I turned to help milady out and—"

"He struck you," Ancil replied, stuttering. "He h-h-hit you on the head with his p-p-pistol!"

"Ah!" Hamilton said, coldly furious. "Then I have another item to add to my frog's score. He struck me and then?"

"Then," Ancil said, "th-th-the coach went off like th-th-the wind!"

"Which way?"

"W-w-winchester."

"Good," Hamilton said. He got to his feet and swayed a moment. "Bring me Bony, Ancil, and you, Fitzie, thank you for your aid."

Fitzie wrung his free hand and shook his head. "What now, lad? What gleam is it now in your eye? You do not intend to pursue them?"

"Of course I pursue them," Hamilton said hotly. "That frog has abducted my clothes. It is an insult. And even more than that, the frog has abducted my honor!"

"Your honor?"

"A mission, entrusted to me by a dying man. Ah, I am a fool." He didn't really believe that though. "The thought of food and wine and a lady's hand wiped out the memory of a promise. They stole some papers from me, Fitzie. I must get them back."

"But by the saints," Fitzie said, "you must first go home and see your brother! He'll ruin me if he knows I took you in and did not send you home. You must see him, John—"

"I intend to see him," Hamilton cried. "You do not expect me to ride to Winchester again in this nightshirt?"

"I do not expect you to ride to Scarsta in it," Fitzie said in horror. "Come in and get some clothes, lad. The scandal, think what people will say—"

"Be damned to people," Hamilton said. "I'll wear my own clothes or none at all." He mounted Bony, who was a sleepy lady at that hour, and rode off up Gage Street toward Scarsta, the Hamilton estate.

SAM was one of the youngest of the Hamilton slaves. He was black as midnight, twenty years of age, and endowed with a firm belief in the supernatural. Thus, when he saw the white nightshirt come riding up to the beautiful red-bricked white-columned colonial house at Scarsta, he instantly fell to his knees and began a powerful prayer. He was jerked upright almost instantly, however, by John Hamilton's firm hand.

"No ghost, Sam," Hamilton said. "Take

Bony to the stables and rub her down and make her ready for a flying trip. And keep your mouth still. On second thought, I'll take you with me this time to remind me that I have a home. You may saddle Goshen, Sam, and provision yourself with any lucky charms you care to carry. Bring a sword, I'll get you a gun. Where is my brother?"

Sam stared at Hamilton, rolling his eyes wildly. "Lawd, Massa Jawn, yo' gwine to ketch it!"

Hamilton scowled. "Is Titus up?"

"He up, he up," Sam prattled. "He one mad gennerman, Massa Jawn. What yo' do in dat Winchester anyhow? Lawd keep yo', son, dat Massa Titus, he madder'n' bull mink in'a matin' season! Las' night late come a horseman all de way frum Winchester. He gwine in he tell yo' brother. Massa Titus, he up all night. He don't sleep atall. His face look lak thunder on de mountain. Yo' gwine to ketch it sharp!"

"Ah well," Hamilton said lightly, "who am I to spit in the eye of Destiny, eh? Mind what I told you, Sam. We leave in minutes."

Sam shook his head. "Hit's trubble. I feel hit in de marrow o' mah bones. Plenty trubble."

Hamilton looked annoyed. "If you don't want to come, stay here then."

"No, no, Massa Jawn. I go 'long wit' yo'. Yo' gwine to need Sam 'round yo' to keep de debbil from yo' shoes, sho 'nough!"

"A lot of help you'll be," Hamilton laughed. "You couldn't hit a barn with a pistol, and you'd get yourself killed on the first lunge with a sword—"

"But I t'row de blade," Sam said darkly. "Ain' no darky in dese hills can t'row de knife lak Sam Dixie t'rows it. Ain' no darky and no white man neither can split a po'k rind at twenty feet."

"Good enough," Hamilton said. "Fix the horses and be ready. If Titus is as angry as you say, I may be leaving sooner than I think."

He pushed the darky off toward the stables and then went up the steps to the house and opened the door and went in. He had some intention of making the upper floor and finding his room first so that he might put on some decent clothes and, at least, look sober, for there was brandy on his lips and the scent of it hung around him.

But he had no such luck.

He was crossing the hall to the foot of the graceful curved staircase when the voice of Titus Hamilton reached him. "John."

He turned. He looked past the hall into the living room and he saw his brother seated before the fire in a barrel chair, his face gloomy and morose and at the same time quite taut and set. Titus was smoking a pipe. He did not move. From where he sat, he commanded a view of the hall. You could not cross to the stairs without being seen. Hamilton smiled. He knew that Titus had waited several hours for this moment to catch him and that though he looked quite composed, Titus was quietly satisfied with having done it.

"Ah well," Hamilton said. "Caught in the act again." He left the hall and strode into the living-room.

"Sit down," Titus said slowly.

"The thought," replied John Hamilton lightly, "appeals to me." He stretched himself out on the lounge, facing his brother and their eyes met. John Hamilton's were insolent; Titus' dark.

THE differences between the two were instantly apparent. One was an epee, the other a saber; one a lion, the other an elephant; one a liberal, the other a reactionary; one a flash, the other a dull glow. Titus Hamilton was six years older than his brother; they did not look at all alike. Titus had the sleek plump aspect of a well-fed lord of fertile lands. He was a very large man, big without any of the physical attraction which the word usually implies. His face was broad, his hands stubby and fleshy. He spoke slowly, his voice very deep. "Well, John?"

"Quite well, thank you," Hamilton said with ease. "You must excuse my costume.

The truth of the matter is some thief has done away with my clothes."

"Thief?" Titus rumbled, unappeased.

"A chap named Caxton," Hamilton said. "Stole my things at the Whistling Oyster. They called him major. I have a score with that fellow."

"Caxton?" Titus rose to his feet and looked disturbed. "You young fool, what are you into now? Major Caxton is one of the cleverest operatives of the British Intelligence!"

Hamilton was not surprised. But he watched his brother sharply. "How do you know that?"

"Because his superiors dined at Scarsta with me yesterday, Lord Cartwright and Sir Gerald Mackey."

Hamilton sniffed. "Fee fi fo fum. I thought I smelled the smell of Englishmen here. All the better then, my dear Titus. My little frog of Brattle Hill has still another item added to his growing list. I will find him and kill him if it is the last thing I do."

Titus did not answer at once. He leaned toward Hamilton, big, oppressive, quietly angry. "John, what have you done to us?"

"To us?"

"To *us,* the Hamiltons!" Titus' voice rose. "Dragged our good name through every swamp in the Virginia valley between here and Winchester! There's filth and disgrace upon it now! You've acted like a bloody peasant, an ill-mannered rooster who—"

Hamilton watched his brother steadily. "I have heard," he said evenly, "that a mud bath returns vigor to the body. Perhaps to a name also. The swamps might do it good. The swamps might rub off the stigma of Tory from the Hamilton name."

Titus swelled. "This is too much. Do you defend your actions? Are you proud of having stabbed George Norwood, of having humiliated Miss Anne before her family and her friends, of having spent a drunken night at an inn instead of returning to your own home, of having returned finally in a state of undress? You defend all this?"

"I do not bother to defend it," Hamilton sighed. "Life, in these last few hours, has proved very enjoyable and thrilling. Why should I defend it?"

Rage boiled up in Titus' soul, but he forced control upon himself and said slowly, ponderously, "By gad, John, this is the end of it. I'll have no more of it. I am finished!"

"You should have realized that a long time ago," Hamilton smiled. "Yes, Titus, you are finished, definitely. You belong to a dying cause, to tyranny, to fear and convention, to selfishness and bigotry. You *are* finished. This war men fight now is a war of ideals. It is a war of democracy, of the equal rights of men. It is a fight for liberty. What is liberty? It is an ideal, but it comes dear when you pay for it in blood. Do you think your Tory souls and British soldiers can win the fight when men shed their blood for so intangible a thing of a love of living honestly?"

"You defend scum," Titus said between set teeth, "but then when you do that, you defend yourself. They call you a rogue in this valley. By gad, you're that and more. You're a rogue, a scoundrel, and a thorough wastrel. You've no decency, no pride, no conscience. What have you to show for your years—nothing, nothing but the wild mind of a madman, the abandon of a satyr, a penniless—"

"What have I to show?" Hamilton said, rising to his feet with a faint smile and bowing in a grand manner. "Why, my dear and righteous Titus, I have everything to show. I have my dagger, I have my pistol, I have my sword, and I have"—he shook the box and threw them out onto the table with a rattle—"my dice." He laughed as they showed a winning number. "I have my health, my life, a zest for that life. I have my belly which enjoys its food and does not fill with belching like your own. These are the things I have. What more could a man want? A wife perhaps. And children. I have no doubt of my ability to gain either, Titus." He shrugged. "Please pardon me now. I must dress. I have business on the highway." And he left.

WHEN he came down again, dressed in fresh clothes for his ride to come, he found Titus Hamilton waiting for him at the foot of the stairs. Titus said, "John, you have come home to Scarsta for the last time."

"I?" Hamilton said. "Not a bit of it, Titus. I have no intention of dying."

"It is not a case of dying," Titus said heavily. "I am turning you out. I am the master of Scarsta, John, or had you forgotten that? And it is no longer open to you from this day forward. An empty gesture to you, perhaps, you spend such little time home, but at least it divorces you from the name of Hamilton, the true and upright name of Hamilton and not your own insidious brand."

Hamilton looked amused. "It is your way of doing it, isn't it, Titus? You've always hated me, haven't you? This isn't what you'd really like to do. You'd like to kill me, wouldn't you? But you're afraid. You're afraid of my sword and my gun and me. So you'll turn me out instead. You must be an unhappy man, unhappy and lonely. I feel sorry for you."

"Damn you, John!" Titus said hotly. "Even in leaving you stay insolent. I want none of your sympathy. I give you here twenty pounds, the last penny you touch out of Scarsta!"

Hamilton shrugged and took it. "You expect me to refuse it in a burst of false pride, eh? Not I, Titus. Twenty pounds—yes, I can make it very useful."

"And I warn you," Titus said. "Keep away from Louise. Keep away from her in Richmond. I am sending her instructions that she is not to see you under penalty of my wrath!"

"Oh, Titus," Hamilton sighed, "you are a stuffy rooster. How can you stop me from seeing my own sister if I want to?"

"I forbid it!"

"Then forbid it over steel," Hamilton snapped. "I'm tired of your prattling, old maid of a man! You haven't seen the last of your black sheep, Titus. That's a promise! I'll come back some time soon to watch the militiamen of Morgan hang your sour face from a sourer—good lord, impossible—apple tree!"

"Get out of here, get out of here!"

"Yes," Hamilton said pleasantly as he stepped through the door to where Sam Dixie waited with Bony, the darky himself astride another horse, "Yes, Titus, it *is* a lovely day. I forgot to tell you that I am borrowing a slave and an extra horse from you. I doubt if I will return them, and if I do, I doubt if they will stay. *Au'voir.*".

"Keep away, I warn you," Titus said. "And you, Sam, take that horse and return to the stables."

Sam Dixie paused. He looked at Hamilton and said, "Massa Jawn?"

"As you please," Hamilton said.

"Den I go wit' yo', suh."

"Sam," said Titus, "you heard me. Go off with him and I'll have you flogged within an inch of your life when I get hands on you again."

"I go 'long wit' Massa Jawn, suh."

Hamilton laughed happily as the two of them rode down the wagon path of Scarsta and headed for the pike to Winchester.

CHAPTER VII

THE GASCON SWORD

RENE DuMAURIER heard the rattle of the coach's wheels on the stones outside the gate of the Hearthstone Inn at Woodridge, Virginia, and he glanced up from his lunch and looked outside. It was a black coach pulled by four horses and it ground to a stop before the inn. He dropped his eyes again to his plate and went on eating.

There was not much of him, he was a remarkably tiny man. In full height he barely reached five feet and a few inches, his weight was not much over a hundred pounds. And yet, he had about him an air of complete self-confidence. He was a Frenchman, very plainly, his fine manners at the table showed that.

You might have suspected from the polished grip of his sword that he had

handled the weapon with more than average dexterity. Metal does not glitter from disuse.

He did not give the coach a second look then and would not have until he heard the voice. A horseman at the coach's side rode up and called to the inn-keeper of the Hearthstone and asked for water for the horses. The voice was faint and it reached René DuMaurier but barely.

Yet he instantly stiffened. It was the voice of a husky frog.

At the same time, his body servant, one Ferdinand Arteille, a dull and stupid fellow who came from the south of France and had been found by René DuMaurier one bright day on the King's Highway, Paris to Bordeaux, sitting in a field of flowers, and waiting for winter to come so that he might move away from the fragrance of the field, rushed into the dining-room of the Hearthstone, crying, *"Monsieur le Comte! Monsieur le Comte! C'est l'homme terrible! C'est le diable anglais!"*

"Indeed," DuMaurier said sharply. "And must you tell it to the world at large? Do you think then that the French language is as dead as the Latin, that none can hear you and understand your concern? Be quiet, you fool of a Ferdinand! The host looks at you. Now smile and bow, *bon, bon,* now gesture as if to follow me to my room, there, that is good, and now, knave, follow me and look as though there was some joy in this life which animates your shuddering carcass."

DuMaurier rose quickly and smiled politely at the innkeeper who had returned from the yard where he had ordered his stable boys to bring water for the coach. There was no danger, probably. Most of these inn-keepers were American enough. But even so, you might meet one with Tory money in his pocket, a fellow who might sell his principle to gain his wealth. You had to be careful.

A good spy, whether he was a Caxton in the British Intelligence, or a Comte René DuMaurier in the American Intelligence, was always careful.

But from the privacy of his own room, Comte René DuMaurier dropped his self-assurance and calm and sprang to his window. He could see the coach in the road below at an oblique angle, and as he watched, the horseman who had yelled at the inn-keeper rode back. *"Morbleu!"* DuMaurier snapped. "It is he without a doubt. It is Major Caxton!"

Ferdinand scratched his head. "Do you think he is after you this time, my old one?"

René DuMaurier shook his head. He was not an old one at all. He was under thirty, but he was homely, his nose quite large and thick, his face striated with lines, his features irregular, his eyes quietly gray and his brows shaggy black. *"Non,* Ferdinand," he said. "He is not after me. The last time we met was in New York. Of a certainty he is unaware of my presence in this valley. And yet—"

"And yet, my brave one?" Ferdinand said, his eyes wide.

"And yet," went on DuMaurier, "it is more than coincidence that Caxton prowls in Virginia. Wait! There is a woman in the coach, I saw her hand—"

HE STOPPED and watched sharply, fingering the grip of his sword while Ferdinand watched, breathless and in wonder. *"Pardieu,"* he whispered in dread, "it is *she!"*

"The evil one?"

"It is *she,"* cried DuMaurier. "La Tournada herself!"

Ferdinand gulped and grew white. "She of the dagger?"

"The same!"

A groan escaped from Ferdinand's lips. "Ah me, we are lost! She will have our lives, master! She will stop at nothing to bite her steel in you!"

But the thought did not disturb DuMaurier. He scowled at the coach. "There," he said. "They go! They are going north!"

"Then we are saved," said Ferdinand.

"Simple dolt," said DuMaurier sadly. "Must your mind always complicate itself

in a problem of simple arithmetic? Why do you think so much of yourself, you whose life is not worth a sou at best? Would you consider the strange fact that both La Tournada and Major Caxton are in Virginia at the same time and at the same place? A matter of mere coincidence, *non? Non!* Is it not also a coincidence that last night Monsieur Callan struck southward to Lace Falls for the Richmond highway carrying sealed orders with him for General Lafayette?"

"But—"

"This is not the time for 'buts,' my churl," DuMaurier said, not unkindly. "This is the time for thought. Feast your eyes on this thing: the coach goes north with Caxton and Milady. North—*toward* New York."

"They are escaping *us,*" cried Ferdinand.

"*Non,* poor one," DuMaurier sighed. "They are, perhaps, taking M. Callan's orders back to General Howe in New York. They have perhaps met and slain M. Callan and removed his papers."

"Ah," groaned Ferdinand lustily. "It is tragedy then!"

"Not yet, not yet." DuMaurier waved his hand. "I have upon me a problem, peasant. Be still and let our brain think. I have the duplicates of Monsieur Callan's orders. They are intact?

"They are still in the bottom of my boot, master."

"Quiet, fool! Would you sketch a chart? But of what use will those orders be to General Lafayette if General Howe is aware of them and engages Washington on the march south?"

"None, master, none."

"It were better," DuMaurier rumbled, "that I follow Caxton and learn the truth. If he has the orders, then I, Comte René DuMaurier, must recover them!"

"And if he does not have them, master?"

"Why then," said the comte, "we will proceed at once to Richmond as before."

"I do not like it," Ferdinand grumbled. "My corns have an ache to them. It means danger."

"It means rain," said DuMaurier drily.

"But how will you find all this out from Caxton?"

"Who knows but the good God? But He will show me a way, poor numbskull, if you pray hard and I keep my wits agile. Quick then, to the stables, saddle the horses and let us be gone from this imitation of a hotel where the food is little better than the leather of the saddle which my bottom has polished so well. *Rapidement!*"

THE coach of Edith Desmond, covered now with the red dust which whipped up from the galloping hooves of the horses ahead, had but reached the bottom of Hollow Creek where the old Kilnline covered bridge went across the waters, a bare ten minutes out of Woodridge and the Hearthstone Inn, when John Hamilton and Sam Dixie appeared over the rise of Two Brothers' Knoll and saw the smoke from the chimney of the Hearthstone Inn a mile away.

They had ridden hard from Lace Falls and the two horses, Bony and Goshen, were white on the flanks with sweat and a little tired. Sam Dixie, not used to such a pace, was tired too, and he rolled his great eyes constantly at the speed, blessing himself with every magic charm he could remember. Atop Two Brothers' knoll, Hamilton reined in, and Goshen, following Bony's lead, nearly pitched Sam off into the dirt as the horse dug in and halted.

"Lawd," Sam breathed, panting in dismay, "why'nt y' wahn a body yo' gwine to dig up roots lak dat?"

Hamilton ignored the query and peered ahead. "There's the Hearthstone. They stopped for water there or I'm a walking cottonmouth! That's Tory, that place, plain Tory when British are around, and underground Tory when Americans abound."

"Ah t'ought old man Dasher run dat place?" Sam said.

"He does," said Hamilton. "But he takes English money."

"We gwine to stop fo' a bite o' food, Massa Jawn? Glory to de lap o' Moses, but mah belly done drop down in mah heels fo' wantin' of vi'tals. We gwine to stop dere, son?"

"We'll stop for a bit," Hamilton said. "The horses are tired. We can't be far behind them now. A coach couldn't come as fast as we've come. I expected to sight them before this. Let's get on then."

They rode off hard once more, down the north side of the Knoll and they quickly polished off the remaining ribbon of road which separated them from the gray-blue smoke which rose into the thin air over the distant inn. They thundered into the yard out front, and Hamilton swung off Bony, patted her flank and instructed Sam Dixie to care for the horses and that food would be sent out to him in the stables.

It was unfortunate that both John Hamilton and Comte René DuMaurier happened to be in a hurry at the same particular moment, for they met at a door which would not allow the passage of two bodies, no matter how short or tall. Ordinarily, Hamilton would have stepped back and allowed the other to pass. But this time he was impatient to eat, refresh himself, and be on the road again, and as he went in, he was so completely engrossed in the thought of meeting the coach, Milady Desmond and Major Rolph Caxton once more, that he did not look where he was going.

Comte René DuMaurier, on the other hand, was the essence of politeness, and one who, considering at the moment the urgency of his profession, did not go out of his way to be rude and start a quarrel. But he also happened to be engrossed with a mind-picture of that same coach, the same occupants, and it was time that the lout, Ferdinand, had finished the horses and time they should be on their way. So perturbed was DuMaurier over what he believed had happened, the slaying of Jeb Callan and the subsequent theft of the papers, that *he* did not look where he was going.

They both met in the doorway and crashed into each other.

Hamilton's big frame felt the shock little. DuMaurier, on the other hand, bounced back into the inn to sit upon his bottom. Some diners at the inn laughed rudely. Ferdinand came up outside with the horses at that second, and Sam Dixie, who had just started to leave, scented trouble and stopped, waiting expectantly, his black hand stealing to the long knife in his belt, all but the knob of its hilt concealed.

DuMAURIER might have passed the moment even then, but the humiliating laughter of the diners within the inn rang in his ears and stirred his blood. He rose to his feet and bounced out into the yard where Hamilton had fallen back in small surprise. "Elephant," DuMaurier cried hotly in the French tongue. "Species of bed bug! Snake with orange eyes! Pig, hog, swine! Robber of blind beggars!"

"Why, *monsieur,*" Hamilton said, in mock horror. "Such language. It is insulting. *Je comprends francais!*"

"You speak French?" DuMaurier said, surprised. But he had gone too far to stop then. "Very well, I repeat it to your face in English that you may make no mistake! You are a clumsy elephant! Why did you not look where you were going?"

"And did you, *monsieur?*" Hamilton said. "If so, why did you not avoid me?"

"The pig avoids the farmer," said DuMaurier. "The slave avoids the master! *I* avoid you! It is insulting!"

"It is, on the contrary, ridiculous," said Hamilton. "And now if you will bear to leave me—"

"Leave? I demand an apology, *monsieur!*"

Hamilton stopped and frowned at the Frenchman. But he found that he could not be angry with the fellow. DuMaurier was such a little man with such a sober and serious face, and that nose! Like a peninsula! Hamilton smiled. He was amused and he showed it. Even DuMaurier's anger had a certain charm. Hamilton, for answer, turned to Sam Dixie and said,

"Sam, I would not advise you to use this front door unless you have something for use as a swatter. There is a fair-sized gnat which gives you quite a bump and it lurks here some place."

DuMaurier went purple. "Tail of a jackass!" he cried. "I will cut your ears off!"

"Aow!" cried Hamilton, wincing. "An insult! It makes my arm ache! I warn you, sir, flee while you can. This hand of mine gropes for my sword. I can hold it but so long!"

"You," replied DuMaurier, "are a braggart, a blowhard, a giant with the heart of a flea! Will you draw and fight, hippopotamus?"

Hamilton laughed at the Frenchman's earnestness. "No, *monsieur*," he bowed. "I will not. I do not fight with dwarfs. I would not want people to say that I chose to kill only little men."

"Bah!" said DuMaurier, infuriated by the casual manner in which Hamilton dismissed him. "You have the strength of a string and the heart of a chicken. Your backbone is the stuff of jelly. The sword is an equalizer of men, it makes little men giants and sometimes it makes giants corpses. You are afraid!"

"Afraid!" Hamilton said darkly. "Come taste my blade then if you are hungry for eternal Morpheus!"

THEIR swords sang out in unison, a shimmering sound like the resonant twang of a longbow's thread. Then, as their blades touched, the musical ring of the striking steel quickly followed and they moved at each other. Sam Dixie, looking severely intent about it all, moved his horse opposite that of DuMaurier's servant, Ferdinand, so that he had a straight line in which to hurl his knife should Ferdinand, who did not have the brains to think that far ahead, attempt to save his master. In the inn, the diners quickly cried out and ran for the door to watch the duel. A crowd gathered as the two went at it.

Before Hamilton had even made his first lunge, he became acutely aware that for the first time he had met a swordsman who might have his life. The little French midget was a demon with the blade. They crossed swords, teasing each other's blade for the inside line and Hamilton, with a feeling of cold pervading him, could not feel the weight of his opponent's steel at all and thus could not sense in what direction it might travel.

He parried two quick thrusts and counter-thrust himself but he struck at air and his sword slid off the hilt of DuMaurier's. The sweat began to run on Hamilton's face and he was glad to note, in a glance during the fray, that DuMaurier's face looked wet also. The action went quickly. Hamilton had difficulty in watching the sword-point opposite him. It moved like lightning, binding, beating, coming in at him. It was almost impossible to see. Now and then the sunlight exploded upon it.

There was no sound at all from the on-watchers. The beauty, the perfect precision of the fencing left them both aghast and awed. The men looked stricken that swords could be handled in such wonder and the fighters live to tell the tale. The women, aware that only one can win a duel, waited for the end in pallid and mounting horror.

Before long twenty minutes had passed, and both Hamilton and DuMaurier had not touched each other. They both dripped sweat and they both panted. Not a word had passed between them up to this, but at last DuMaurier feinted twice and then made a beautiful lunge which passed the point of his sword so close to Hamilton's left side that the steel actually impaled Hamilton's coat and left a thin slit in the material when it was withdrawn. "By gad," Hamilton breathed in grim admiration at the way the feints had drawn his parry off, "you fight like a Gascon, *monsieur!*"

"*Like* a Gascon!" DuMaurier grunted, defending himself as Hamilton moved forward in a walking attack and beat down the Frenchman's blade, searching for a gap to pass his sword over and through, "*I am* a Gascon, sir!"

"A Gascon?" Hamilton said, amazed. "You are a Gascon, *monsieur le tigre?*"

"I am!"

"The ilk of de Bergerac and D'Artagnan?"

"The same!"

"Monsieur!" Hamilton drew back and dug his blade into the dust. He clicked his heels. "I refuse to fight. I cannot kill a Gascon. It goes against my grain."

"AHA!" DuMaurier cried, quietly pleased, but adamant. "It is that you have fear of a Gascon, eh, *monsieur?*"

"It is," replied Hamilton, "that I have respect for one."

"You are afraid!"

"What?" Hamilton cried, and sprang at DuMaurier again.

For ten minutes more, the fight continued, a fight of white heat, the exchanges and thrusts and parries so rapid that the spectators could not even see the flashes of the blades. DuMaurier sweated and grew pale now, and finally he cried, exasperated, "I must kill you!"

"You may at that," Hamilton replied grimly.

"You admit I am your better!"

"I do not! I admit you are my equal!"

"Ah!" said DuMaurier, pleased. "One moment, *monsieur.*" The swords dropped down and they faced each other. "You yourself fight like a Gascon."

Hamilton nodded. "I was taught by a Gascon."

"No!"

"Yes. You wish his name? Capitaine Franco LaSalle."

"The captain of the musketeers!"

"Oui, à Paris!"

DuMaurier looked shocked. *"Monsieur!* Why did you not tell me this? How can we kill each other if we both fight as in Gascony? *C'est impossible!* Gascons cannot kill each other. They match too equal! And you—a student of *mon ami* Franco LaSalle!" He bowed. "I apologize for my hot words, *monsieur.*"

Hamilton smiled. "And I for mine!"

A man in the crowd snickered. "One would expect them to dance together now. They are so polite."

"What?" Hamilton roared.

"Scum!" flashed DuMaurier, extending his blade.

The spectators vanished amidst a little cry from the ladies, and the field of battle was left to the combatants. They sheathed their swords and then DuMaurier rushed over and embraced Hamilton. "My friend! You are a brave man! You are a gentleman! Already I feel a fondness for you in my heart! We shall be brothers! Your name?"

"John Hamilton, *monsieur!*"

"Morbleu! You are he then, the one they call the Rogue of Shenendoah? I have heard of you! You are an American!"

"I was born in Virginia," said Hamilton.

"Oui, yes, but others were born here and remain Tory. You are the true American. Your heart goes with Washington."

Hamilton nodded. "That is true." He coughed. "And you, sir?"

"Comte René DuMaurier," said the Frenchman proudly. "Like General Lafayette, I am on holiday from Paris."

Hamilton smiled slyly. "What you mean is, you are enlisted in the American cause?"

"Hush! More of that I will tell later when we have left the prying ears of informers behind. You are going to Winchester?"

"I am. But first, food."

"Food by all means. And I will delay, and go with you."

"But, Count DuMaurier," Hamilton said, "you were in a hurry?"

"True, I am following a coach which just passed through this town, but—"

"A coach?" Hamilton cried. "With a treacherously lovely lady flanked by a frog on horseback?"

"The same!"

"It is the same *I* follow!" Hamilton exclaimed. "The man—I have a score with him—he is my frog of Brattle Hill! And the lady, damn her wonderful insolence, has robbed me of important papers which I had planned to deliver to Richmond!"

"Monsieur," said DuMaurier, gravely, "there is something in what you say which leads me to believe we have a common cause. If I were to mention the name Callan—aha!—then you carry his papers? He is dead?"

"Yes," Hamilton cried. "She has stolen them!" He grimaced. "I was off to enlist with the armies. I have made a bad beginning."

"A bad beginning perhaps, M. Hamilton, but one which we will rectify. Edith Desmond is the most dangerous spy in the British Intelligence. They call her La Tournada."

"La Tournada—the one with the dagger—"

"The same."

"Then," said Hamilton in cold fury, "it was all a trick to draw me away. She baited me while he stole my things! I'll be the death of them!"

"Ah," said DuMaurier happily. "And in that quest, *monsieur,* you are hereby offered my name, my honor, my money, and, but not least, my sword. Hurry and let us be on the way! We follow the same coach! And for the sake of your enlistment, I hereby swear you into the American Intelligence, *monsieur,* and tell you frankly that I already love you like my own!"

CHAPTER VIII

PURSUIT OF MILADY

THEY were a sight to see, those four horsemen of the Apocalypse as they thudded north past Bring Bridge and Crow's Gap hot on the dust of Milady Desmond's coach. There was John Hamilton, out in front on the black mare Bony, the horse stretched out like a galloping hare, the rider bent forward in the wind, his cloak cracking whiplike in the blast of wind from the speed. Behind their heels, came DuMaurier, the white and blue plume upon his hat bent over in the breeze, his nose so long and large that sometimes he looked, when leaning forward, to be ahead of his own horse; so tiny was he that he looked like the spawn of the giant who rode ahead of him. And then the dark sober face of Sam Dixie mounted on Goshen, his eyes white and fearful against his own dusky skin. And behind him, Ferdinand, the dolt, lopping crazily in his saddle, hanging to the saddle horn, having dropped the reins, one hand on his hat to hold it on his head, the horse following the others for sheer company and not by guidance.

The sun was an hour past its zenith which they rode into Carteret, which was a small hamlet not more than six miles outside the limits of Winchester town. They stopped at an inn, the Golden Horn, which was scarcely more than a shack, and here they watered their horses while Hamilton made inquiries of the inn-keeper.

Hamilton came back to his friends excitedly. "They passed through here but ten minutes ago!" he said. "Their dust will fill our noses all the rest of the way!"

"Ma foi," sighed DuMaurier, "we have made up the time we lost them. I thought perhaps we had passed them in a rush of wind a way back, so much like the lightning of heaven did we go! Phew! Even my nose, which is the strongest member of me, grows tired in this dash."

"Courage, my friend," Hamilton said excitedly. "Think of the game we hunt for!"

DuMaurier frowned. "John," he said quietly, "I have been thinking of this game we hunt. And I have been thinking of you. In this hour together, we have become friends. You have opened your heart and soul to me and you have told me all, but have you not noticed that I was reticent, that I did not tell you anything but my name?"

"But it is none of my business," Hamilton said. "You will tell me what you wish to tell me. What I have told you, I wanted to tell you."

"John," Count DuMaurier said, "I will tell you all now. But first I had to find in you one of trust. My calling is of such hazardous nature that I needs must be of the close mouth. But you I can trust."

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure," said DuMaurier. "What you have already told me proves that, this tale of Jeb Callan and the theft of the papers. *Monsieur,* Callan was not a spy. He was a messenger. He was one of a series of messengers carrying that sheaf which has passed into La Tournada's hands. He received the packet when it reached Virginia and it was up to him to deliver it into Lafayette's hands. But there is a duplicate of those same orders. I carry them."

"You too are a messenger then?"

"And sometimes more, my friend."

"Then why do you bother to follow Milady to Winchester?" Hamilton asked. "Why don't you go on to Richmond and deliver the orders?"

DuMaurier sighed. "If it were that simple—but it is not. I am aware, *monsieur,* of what those orders are. They prescribe a route of march and a time of attack. General Washington plans to strike south suddenly, join Lafayette and the French fleet and lay seige to Cornwallis at Yorktown. Of what use are these orders to Lafayette when General Howe may have the same ones in his hands? General Howe will then move to intercept Washington no matter what the cost. The march will be halted, the siege a bubble."

"I understand," Hamilton said fiercely. "We must prevent the papers from returning to New York."

"C'est vrai."

"You are certain they have not been decoded?"

"It is a new code. I am certain that La Tournada and Major Caxton did not know the key. In all probability, Milady Desmond will carry them back and leave Caxton in this land. She probably carries them now. It is she we must reach!"

"Then I am the one to do that," said Hamilton. "She knows me, she thinks me a likely fool, she probably believes I consider her an abducted lady and will help her in her escapade. She might consider me an ally for the love of her. Let us get on to Winchester then!"

"This Winchester," DuMaurier said, "what sort of place is it for the health of men like ourselves?"

"It is a bad spot," replied Hamilton, "for Englishmen. It is full of Colonial trappers and only those Tories who are wealthy and powerful have escaped the wrath of the township. There have been burnt houses. I saw them only a day ago when I—"

"They will stop there without a doubt," DuMaurier said. "Where will they stay?"

"Why," said Hamilton, frowning, "I don't know."

"A hotel? An inn?"

"Too dangerous."

"A refuge? An underground stop-over? A Tory home?"

"The Norwoods!" Hamilton cried. "By gad, that would be a pretty pickle! Still—"

"You think you know?"

"*I think* perhaps I can learn."

"Good, let us hurry then!"

THEY rode the last six miles like a whirlwind, and DuMaurier and Hamilton soon outdistanced the two servants, black and white. Before they left each other, Hamilton called to Sam Dixie and told him the rendezvous would be the home of Caleb Woodstock. Sam knew where it was. More than once he carted Hamilton's frame there to sober up in a night to be ready for the pike in the morning.

When Hamilton and DuMaurier reached Winchester, it was mid-afternoon and the sun was hot. Not a soul was in sight, the summer heat by day brought with it a natural siesta time. A stray dog sleepily evaded the hooves of their horses. They saw a darky lolling sleepily on a doorstep. Hamilton ground to a stop before the man and tapped his nodding head with the flat of his sword. "Wake up, you black devil of a lazing lump!"

The darky came out of it with his eyes bulging from his head. He saw the sword first, the black mare second, the big frame of Hamilton third, and his mouth jiggled with fright.

"Have you been asleep long?"

"Ah jes' bin dozin', sah," the darky cried. "Ah bin dozin' on'n'off doin' no hahm, sah!"

"Did you see a coach come through here a few minutes ago?" Hamilton roared in a terrible voice, for he wanted the truth and not a convenient lie for an affirmative.

"Yassah, yassah," cried the darky in terror. "Ah seed de coach, sah! Black ez naht wid fo' ho'ses hawlin' it an' a lady insahde! Dere was a geenerman aho'se 'longsahde!"

Hamilton said, more quietly, "That's it. Which way?"

"Wes'," said the darky. "Dey go wes' out'n to de Norwood place! Dey was gwine lak a blue bolt, sah!"

"Back to sleep, Gabriel!" Hamilton snapped. "And wipe me and my questions from your mind, if you have one!"

He and DuMaurier spurred their horses and rode west through the sleepy town. It was a quaint place, a vision of red brick and white wood and part of the street held cobbles which petered off into red dirt. Hamilton did not ride fast and prompted DuMaurier to say, "What holds us up, *mon ami?*"

"There is no point in hurrying now," Hamilton said. "They have gone to the Norwood plantation. It is the only place of note on this road. They cannot go to New York that way unless they ride clean over to Ohio and doubled back and I hardly think they will do that. Remember, they do not suspect they are being followed.

"Eh *bien.* And then?"

"They will have to return this way to reach the pike for Philadelphia and New York. I think they will stop over at Norwood's tonight. We can do nothing by day. Matter of fact, Count, I should not even be seen here by day."

"You are known to the Norwoods?"

Hamilton laughed, a little bitterly. "Too well perhaps."

"Then you plan to wait until tonight?"

"Yes. We can get all the information we need from Sam Dixie. We'll wait for him at Caleb Woodstock's place. When he arrives, I'll send him on to Norwood's plantation. He can put in there without notice. He's a slave, he has a cousin in the Norwood slaves. He can look around and then report back to us. And tonight we'll see what we can do."

"Monsieur," exclaimed René DuMaurier happily, "you are a genius, a true genius, and, in the bargain, a very convenient man to know."

"Time," replied Hamilton drily, "may prove you wrong on that last point. There is Woodstock's. We'll go in."

CHAPTER IX

BEWARE LA TOURNADA

THE night came down slowly and still Sam Dixie did not put in an appearance. Hamilton watched the lush twilight against the black and rugged peaks of the Alleghenies to the west and he was vaguely disturbed. The only consolation he had in the delay was the fact that gunpowder would not have made Sam Dixie move fast if he had no mind to do so.

That afternoon, Sam and Ferdinand had finally arrived and Sam had been dispatched to the Norwood place. The darky had been quite confident of his ability to do a little espionage and, as a matter of fact, he was very anxious to see his cousin, Emeralda, because she was going to have a baby soon and Sam's mammy had given him a special charm for Emeralda to wear and protect herself. So Sam Dixie went off to Norwood's in good spirits and little fear.

But now, with the shadows lengthening across the valley of Virginia and the sun dying beyond the mountains, Hamilton did not look gay and he paced the floor of Caleb Woodstock's house nervously.

Comte René DuMaurier, on the other hand, was very much at ease. At first he had been amazed at the rugged simplicity of Caleb's home, its interior raw pine with a great granite fireplace, powderhorns and pelts strung on the walls, along with a rusty saber and two rifles with a shotgun. He had been amazed, too, by

Caleb Woodstock himself, for Caleb could not have been a very old man, yet he was full of wild tales and wisdom, and the wind and the rain of wilderness had made his face a leathery blotch of lines and highlights, and encounters with Injuns had put a scar or two in his head. His hospitality outdid the finest that DuMaurier had ever accepted, and he had visited with King Louis of France. A king and a trapper were far apart, indeed, DuMaurier thought. One gave you from his wealth, and the other gave you from his heart. DuMaurier listened to the tales of Caleb in awe, and as for poor Ferdinand, his hair all but turned white when Caleb showed his arrow scars.

The night was complete, black and still, except for the chirping night bugs, when there was a clatter outside the house and a horse rode up to the door. Hamilton sprang instantly to the entrance and opened the door in time to see Sam Dixie slide crazily off Goshen. "Sam!" Hamilton cried sharply. "Are you hurt?"

"No, Massa Jawn," Sam said. "Ah jest is hurryin', dat's awl."

Hamilton grabbed the darky. "If you're hurrying," he said, "I'd hate to see you taking things slowly. Where have you been? I thought they'd murdered you! I was getting ready to go up and find out for myself!"

"Why, Massa Jawn," Sam said, "ah couldn' git away no quicker den ah did. Ah hadda wait upon de dark so no'un could see me go and suspishon me, suh."

The door was shut and they moved into the living room. DuMaurier left Ferdinand to listen to Caleb's tales, but Caleb stopped his telling to listen to Sam's report.

"Well," Sam said, "dey dere awl raht."

"Both of them?" Hamilton said, elated. His eyes brightened. "Lady Desmond and my frog of Brattle Hill?"

"No," said Sam. "Dey was both dere dis yafternoon. But den dis man Caxton, he leave aho'se and he gwine back t' Lace Falls. He gwine t'meet up'n wit' two gennermen dere. Dey call one a lawd."

"CARTWRIGHT," said DuMaurier. "Lord Cartwright. Then Sir Gerald Mackey must be with him. They are Caxton's superiors, John. I last saw them in Richmond. If they are in Lace Falls, it means the British are afraid. They must scent that Washington, like the old fox he is, is up to something. They happen to be right."

"How did you learn this, Sam?" Hamilton asked.

"Ah gotta big ear, Massa Jawn."

"Good work. And what about Milady Desmond?"

"She gwine t' spend de naht wit' de Norwoods," Sam said. "Den she gwine t' move on t' New Yawk in de mornin'."

"Ah," DuMaurier sighed. "She has the papers then. I was quite right, *non?*" He beamed at the darky. "This servant of yours, John, he makes an excellent spy."

Hamilton laughed at Sam's grin. "Tell me something else, Sam, how is George Norwood?"

"Lawd, Massa Jawn, yo' sho' stick dat boy proper! He in bed and makin' up fine. Ain't nothin' much, Emeralda tole me, he was walkin' 'round today. But great junipah berries, how dat boy howl and groan lak he was dyin'. He puttin' it on, suh. He say he shoot yo' on sight."

"And Miss Anne?" Hamilton said.

"I seen her jest oncet," Sam said. "She look maghty sad, suh. She jest mopin' 'round de place lak she lost a husband. She look soft and kinda sweet'n'sad."

"Sweet and sad!" Hamilton breathed, pleased. "Crying perhaps?"

"She shed a tear o' two, Massa Jawn. Her ahs don't look lak dey sleep good."

"Then Kathie was right! She loves me!"

Sam Dixie coughed and looked discomfitted. "Ain' so sho' 'bout dat, Massa Jawn. Matter o' fact is she sweet and sad 'bout po' George who yo' run yo' sticker in. She ain' cryin' 'bout yo' none."

Hamilton's face fell perceptibly. "You're certain, Sam?"

"Sho' as rain," Sam said. "Dis Majer Caxton, he git t' talkin' t' Old Man Nor-

wood, and he say, 'Suh,' he say, jest lak he was gwine t' tell a good tale, 'didja evah heah tell of a rascal by de name Jawn Hamilton?' Well, suh, Old Man Norwood, he rise up lak fire in de turkey brush and he say, "Ah thank yo', suh, not t'mentshun dat name in dis yere house, suh.' And den Miz Anne, she say, 'Dat's all raght, father, dat's all right. We talk 'bout horsethieves and Injuns and other scum, we maght jest well tak 'bout Jawn Hamilton.' And den ah done heah no mo'."

"Mon ami," DuMaurier said, quietly crushed. "This is the lady of whom you told me, your bride to be? I am devastated. She is a Norwood? It is terrible. Why did you not tell me this Norwood place and this lady you meant to marry, they were the same? My heart bleeds for you. You cannot go through with it."

Sam Dixie gaped.

"Go through with what?" Hamilton said bitterly, only half-hearing the count.

"Why," said DuMaurier, "you cannot attempt to reach Milady Desmond at the Norwood plantation. If you were caught, they'd have the life out of you!"

Hamilton shrugged. "And would it be so different with you if you were caught in my stead, Count?"

"I would start, at least," replied DuMaurier, smiling faintly, "with a chance to lie my way out of it, which you could not do."

"You do not know," Hamilton said, "how good a liar I am."

DuMaurier showed surprise. "You mean to go through with it?"

"Of course. I may need your help. Sam, what are the chances?"

Sam Dixie shook his head. "Mah bones ache, Massa Jawn. Dat don' mean so good."

"And my corns!" Ferdinand cried. "My corns hurt. It means there is danger!"

"Never mind the medical symptoms," Hamilton snapped. "I mean is the Norwood place guarded."

"Dat's what ah mean by mah bones," Sam Dixie said. "Dey got lotta men up dere, suh. Wit' pistols in dere belts. Six seben men. Dey look lak soldiers wit'out uniforms."

"Morbleu!" DuMaurier frowned. "That is not good."

"THEY sleep like any other mortals," Hamilton replied. "It is only a precaution, they do not expect anyone to swoop down on them. I fancy the guards are there to halt hot-headed Colonials bent on burning the homes of Tories. They had four such guards when I rode up to be married."

Sam Dixie looked ashamed. "Maybe dere *was* only four, suh. Maybe ah got big eyes, suh."

"I thought so," Hamilton said. "Damn your eyes, Sam. Look here, Count. They'll not be expecting a pair of us to steal in there by night. I tell you the place will be dark as midnight. If we wait until ten and then go up, I promise you we'll come back with those papers."

"Oui, oui," DuMaurier joined in, his eyes bright with the impending excitement, "But *how, monsieur?* The papers they do not wait there for the mere plucking. Milady Desmond did not find the name of La Tournada by being a poor spy. She is clever."

"She is a woman," said Hamilton.

"Physically, yes," DuMaurier nodded. "But she thinks like a man, my friend. And there is nothing dainty nor charming in the *modus operandi* of her stab." He closed his eyes thoughtfully and appeared to dream up a picture. "The knife itself is small, the blade, bright as nickel, no more than four inches long. The grip is pearl. She holds it flat in her palm, in the grip of supination, so to speak. She smiles at you, oh so exquisitely, and then *zsst!* She thrusts, and la! you have cold steel in your belly." DuMaurier opened his eyes. "She is deadly, that one."

Hamilton shivered at the Frenchman's tone. "You speak like one with authority," he said slowly. "And yet, I can't quite believe it, René. Beauty is only skin-deep, I know, but she has a soul. I know that. It is an honest sort of soul."

DuMaurier looked stern. "John. Before we continue in this escapade, there is something I must show you. I am afraid that it is you sentimentalize La Tournada too much for your own safety. You cannot trust her any more than you can trust a *serpente aux sonnettes*. For proof of that, I bare myself." And he ripped open his coat and shirt to exhibit to Hamilton a ghastly red scar on his stomach. "Some of her victims, my friend, do not die, but rather live to tell the tale and wait patiently upon her life."

"You!"

"Four years ago, young romancer. In Montreal, when Burgoyne tried to strike south and met with defeat in the forests."

"By gad!"

René DuMaurier nodded. "Yes, *mon brave*, I think from your face that this lesson is complete. I think perhaps you will be careful. I ask you one thing: remember this hideous thing in my flesh all the time. It is not clean like the sword wound, it is twisted. It could happen to you. *C'est bien.* Let us attack. . . ."

THE crickets were chirping cheerfully all around them and the sound was a pleasant one. John Hamilton felt at home in the open. This was earth, Virginia. All it lacked to make the spell of night complete was the smell of fresh rain and the plaintive beautiful note of a night bird. But that would have put the stars to bed. A pity you couldn't have both. "Quiet!" Hamilton snapped to the count. "You broke a twig there."

"Mon dieu!" whispered DuMaurier wrily. "I am no woodsman, John! I am no Caleb Woodstock! Forgive me this."

Hamilton did not reply. He watched the white brick home of the Norwood, palatial and lovely in the moonlight up on the rise of the hill, far back from the rough stone fence which encircled the property. They had tied their horses near a clump of rhododendron bushes in a glade across the road.

"There are no lights but one," DuMaurier said.

"Yes," Hamilton nodded. "That one is nothing. They burn a candle in the lower hall at night. The house is dark. They have all retired. I'm sure of that."

"Eh? And the guards?"

Hamilton shrugged. "Who can tell? It's a risk we'll have to take."

"And now?"

"So simple," Hamilton said, "that it is bound to go wrong. I know this house, René. And I know that if Edith Desmond is a guest here for the night, she'll have been given the Blue Room. It is the Norwood's gift of elegance to any guest. All right. There sleeps Milady. We go up there. I climb the trellis and enter her room, the window will be open this warm night. You stand below. You wait ten minutes—no—fifteen minutes. Count off each one. And then you cry 'Fire!!' and make for your horse. Get away no matter what happens, I'll throw you the papers from the window. Meet me back at Caleb's house."

"Sacristi!" DuMaurier swore, rubbing his long nose briskly. "I smell it, a scent which is not good, like the manure in the stables. Danger, John. I smell it with this peninsula I breathe with. Much danger."

"What?" Hamilton said gayly. "With your sword below and my own above? Gascons' swords?"

"Swords and a woman," said DuMaurier. "The woman is sharper and more tempered."

"But the sword," replied Hamilton quickly, "is faster and more respected. Talk wastes precious time, *mon vieux*. It is action now. Let us go."

They left their horses behind and crept over the stone wall and onto the long sweeping stretch of greensward. They were black bulks in the moonlight and they moved, low down and inconspicuously and slowly, a bit of dread in each of their hearts that a challenge might ring out in the stillness. There went the giant—Hamilton, and the dwarf—DuMaurier, without a sound, except for the pounding of their hearts in their own ears.

Close to the house then. And some

gravel to be stepped on gently. The wind was from the west and it blew gently, touching their wet faces, wet with the sweat of anticipation, like a caress. Here was the white trellis, half-buried beneath the rose vines thick with the opened pinks. By day a climb through those flowers would have been a painful thing; the bees hung close. By night the bees were gone; only the heavenly scent of the flowers remained.

"Here," Hamilton whispered. "Keep the voice of your scabbard still. It is that window above me. I'll climb now."

"John," René DuMaurier whispered, grasping Hamilton's hand. "I say this to you now. *Vous êtes un orai homme!* I love you like a brother. It is so strange, we have known each other so short a time, and yet, in my heart, there is friendship which one offers his life to keep intact. Let me go in your place."

"No." Hamilton patted DuMaurier's arm. *"Merci,* my brave friend. But I promise to come back."

"Ah," sighed DuMaurier. "It was so simple for them to take the papers from you, and now so hard to get them back. You were a fool for the love of her."

Hamilton smiled. "It was a pleasant night. May this one be as sweet."

"Allons, alors," DuMaurier said then. "Go, be of a careful mind and step, and should you meet Kismet on the way, hold back his arm and be polite and kick him not in the trousers. Fate holds such things against one. I pray for you, my friend, the most powerful prayer which René DuMaurier, Comte de Chauville, have ever prayed before."

Hamilton smiled once, then turned to the trellis and went up it silently, hand over hand, his cloak rustling in the night wind.

DuMaurier, standing on the ground, thought to himself how much like a climbing lion that big body looked, and he waited, shivering with suspense and dread, and automatically began to count off the seconds of the minutes he must wait.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Hamilton sent the blade through the Englishman's body

The Rogue

By RICHARD SALE

IN the summer of 1781 there was a pause in the Revolution, for Howe and Cornwallis held their troops inactive, waiting for the next move of the rebel Washington. . . .

Riding down a highroad of Virginia, John Hamilton, the Rogue of the Shenandoah, has much to occupy his mind. By then he should have been the husband of Miss Anne Norwood—but the small matter of a duel with the bride's brother has made that impossible. For John Hamilton is devoted to the Colonial cause, and the Norwoods, like his brother Titus, are Tories.

The ring of swordblades draws Hamilton from the highway. Some moments later he is bending over a dying Colonial, while the hoofbeats of the British major's horse fade in the distance. And before the wounded man dies he intrusts to John Hamilton a sealed packet, the message from Washington to Lafayette.

THAT night is a busy one for the inn called The Whistling Oyster. In the kitchen John Hamilton chats with his friend the innkeeper—and when a certain British Major Caxton, reporting to his superiors in the parlor, catches a glimpse of Hamilton, the Englishman lays a plan to steal the dispatches. Fortunately for them, La Tournada, a beautiful British spy, is at The Whistling Oyster that night. . . .

About midnight Hamilton is awakened by a woman's scream in the next room. His gallantry wins him the company of a charming lady who calls herself Edith Desmond—but the next morning he arises to discover that the sealed packet has been stolen. Edith Desmond flees the inn with Major Caxton before Hamilton can reach her.

Rogue Hamilton visits his brother Titus, only to be ordered from the house for disloyalty to the King. He sets out with a negro servant to recover the message for Lafayette. At an inn he strikes up a friendship with a Gascon—Comte René Du Maurier—who is doing intelligence work for the Colonials, and together they ride toward the Norwood plantation. There, they have learned, the major and Edith Desmond are spending the night. When the house is dark that evening, Hamilton and Du Maurier stand under the window where Milady Desmond sleeps.

This story began in the Argosy for June 11

Hamilton is to climb into the room; the the Frenchman to stay below and cry, "Fire!" ten minutes later. . . .

CHAPTER X

CRY FIRE

JOHN HAMILTON stepped over the low sill of the window and stepped into the room without a sound other than the soft rustle of his cloak. The room was quite dark, and yet the moonlight lent it a glow which made everything faintly but distinctly visible. There was the door, opposite him, securely shut. A wardrobe closet to the left of it. And there, against the wall to his right, was the elegant canopied bed, its top ice-blue satin, touched on the fringes with lace.

He moved to it, seeing the form of the sleeper. Hamilton wanted to be sure he had the right woman. And he had made no mistake, Edith Desmond slept in the bed.

She looked more beautiful than she had the night he first met her. She was asleep on her back, and her head turned slightly toward the left, as if facing the window. In the moonlight her skin looked pale and masklike, her full mouth lay half-open, the white of her teeth breaking through her parted lips. She breathed quietly. Her graceful hands were at her sides. The night was warm, and she had only drawn a sheet over her body, and it draped her closely and brought out the lines of her figure. Hamilton stared at her and sighed. It was a lovely figure. You could hardly believe that beauty like that belonged to a woman who could kill.

He wanted to be certain that she would recognize him when she awoke. He took the flint from his pocket and struck it. He lighted one of the candles in the room. Its tapered tear of flame flickered up shyly and lighted the room. But she didn't stir.

He moved toward her bed, and finally sat down on the side of it, moving her left hand to her breast. The movement of her hand disturbed her slightly. She sighed in quiet annoyance and turned slightly. But she did not open her eyes. He patted her face then.

HER eyes flashed open instantly. It took her only a brief moment to gather her wits and comprehend the situation. Hamilton admired the keen quick manner in which she recognized, not only him, but her entire predicament. No scream or cry of fright, no pallid cheek, nor frightened eyes. She accepted her fate coolly enough. "You?" she said sadly. "I underestimated you, John Hamilton."

Hamilton shrugged. "Why do people underestimate me? Do I look stupid like a toad? Do I appear dull like my own razor? Is the mere sight of my gaiety a sign that I am not profound? Does my youth, which is not in the least extreme, brand me as a child when it comes to swordplay? Does a dexterous lover imply an inept gallant?"

"It is your smile," Edith Desmond replied quietly. "Your smile is the smile of a child. One is deceived. If I had remembered the set of your jaw or the level of your eyes—"

"So my smile deceived you." His voice was harsh. "Perhaps it will flatter you, my dear, to learn that the beauty of Edith Desmond deceived *me*—for a night. But the morning taught me that her golden hair is mirage, in reality it is a cluster of serpents; her name is not really Edith Desmond, it is La Tournada which is to say Medusa. And while she is exquisitely versed in the arts of love, her skill is even greater with the short dagger. Do you attempt to deny this?"

"I do not deny it," she said.

She had drawn closer to him, and for a moment or two he stared down at her without speaking. Her face was quite calm and smiling slightly, her lips parted.

Hamilton took a deep breath. "Perhaps you do not believe that," he said slowly, "perhaps you do not believe I would kill you. But, Milady Desmond, there is something that holds my heart even more securely than a lovely woman

could. A month ago I would have stumbled across this continent in the hope of seeing your face again. Even though I had been warned of La Tournada's dagger." She was still smiling, he saw, and he went on, softly: "But that was a month ago, Milady. Today is a hundred years later, and there is a young country fighting to be free. Her fate is infinitely more important to me than your beauty—or your life."

He could hear her soft, even breathing, and when he looked down again he saw that her expression had not changed. He felt the gentle pressure of her arm against his side.

"I believe you," she said. "You would kill me, yes; but you would not forget me, my gallant Hamilton. You would put a bullet into me with dispatch—but afterward while you rode about this country of yours, Edith Desmond would remain in your heart as persistently as these grave matters of liberty." Her hand was on his shoulder now. "It would be most uncomfortable, John Hamilton."

He heard her whisper of laughter. "You—," he said, and then her arms were around his neck, pulling him down to her, and her mouth found his.

At the same instant there was a cry outside the window. They pulled apart.

"Fire!" a voice shouted.

Milady Desmond hesitated one second and then instinctively threw her hands to her breast.

"Ah," said Hamilton sharply. He bent over and seized her roughly, jerking her fingers away.

COMTE RENÉ DU MAURIER saw Hamilton's bulk appear in the window above, and the Frenchman was greatly relieved. It had been half a minute at least since he cried, "Fire," and he wondered whether he had been loud enough. It had been a rare thing, trying to shout "fire" in as inconspicuous a way as possible, and still sound loud enough so as to deceive milady into thinking it the real thing. The point was he had to reach milady's ears and sound real, and at the same time stay away from the sleeping ears at the Norwood place and sound unreal, indeed, a figment of some dream.

But here was Hamilton now, half falling down the trellis, and in another instant, they were together and Du Maurier cried, "Did you get them?"

"I did!" Hamilton replied. "Let's get out of here before she rouses up the whole place."

"Where were they? Where had she hidden them?"

"Ah, my friend," Hamilton said, "I cannot tell you. It was too sacred a place to speak of publicly!"

"But you have them, *mon brave?*"

"Gad, yes, I have them. Come on! Go faster my little pumpkin and work away that stomach of yours."

They were running across the long greensward in front of the Norwood house as fast as their legs would take them. Du Maurier suddenly grabbed Hamilton by the arm and jerked him to a halt. *"Monsieur, monsieur,"* he said excitedly. "I have been thinking of your remark concerning the hiding place of the papers. John, my foolish one, you did not imply that she had hidden these papers in the bodice of her dress?"

"Her night dress," Hamilton said.

"Mon Dieu!" Du Maurier said savagely. "You have been tricked! That is so obvious! Madame Desmond is a clever woman, she is no young girl to be startled by your appearance, no young fool to hide important papers in the bodice."

Hamilton gaped at him. "But I have the papers, René. How can I have been tricked?"

"Let me see them!"

"Not here. She'll bring the house up. They'll be searching for us. We must get out of here first."

"John, you are a stupid bedbug," Du Maurier groaned. "Give of yourself a glance at the establishment. What do you see?"

The house was black and silent. No

candles moved in any rooms and the only light was the undisturbed candle in the lower hall, the same as they had first seen it. There were no voices, no cries, no sign of any sort of chase.

"By gad," Hamilton snapped, "the place is silent as a tomb!"

"The papers, *mon petit.*"

Du Maurier jerked the sheaf of papers from Hamilton's hand and ripped them open hastily with an index finger. He brought them up in the moonlight and they both examined the pages. They did not have to examine the papers very fully. Even the pallid moonlight showed that Milady Desmond had been cleverer than Hamilton thought.

The pages were utterly blank.

"BY THE tomahawk of Cornstalk!" Hamilton cried with fire in his eyes and anger in his voice, "This woman is becoming difficult!"

"Difficult?" René Du Maurier exclaimed with sarcasm. "She fools you once, she steals your clothes, she tricks you a second time with blank papers in a bodice, she laughs up her sleeve at you and at the same time pretends to be affectionate with you, all this. And you say she is difficult? You are a mild man, *monsieur l'enfant.* I would say myself she is a clever devil, a smart *tigre;* I would say she was of the progeny of Satan himself?"

"How could we have foreseen this?" Hamilton asked. "She jerked and twitched, startled when you called fire. And yet in that instant, she must have suspected. Think of it, René, she deliberately reached her hands toward the hiding place of the *false* papers! I would have thought it a natural instinct to reach for real ones at such a time."

"The natural instinct, yes. Even milady," Du Maurier said, "would have reached for the true papers if she had believed in the truth of my cry. But she did not. We are both at fault, my giant, for apparently your attentions were none too sincere, and my cry was none too convincing. Ah, *mon dieu,*" he sighed. "We are beaten again. Now we must follow her coach into Pennsylvania." He shrugged. "There is, maybe, the chance that she will ride alone in her coach tomorrow. We may attack and—"

"René," said Hamilton evenly, "you know as well as I that Edith Desmond will travel the rest of the route to New York under guard. If I have made this attempt once, why should she think that I would not make a second attempt, especially since she has tricked me with blank sheets here? It would cost a life if we try later."

Comte Du Maurier rubbed his nose briskly and then threw up his hand. "Will you tell this laboring man of me what else we can do?"

"Now!" said Hamilton.

"Now?" whispered Du Maurier.

"Why not?"

"You mean—"

"Go back now. Make another try. This time by force. I have a feeling I should know where the papers are. I have been thinking. There was something about her, something that was missing. It is the clue."

"Sacristi!" Du Maurier gasped, paling. "It is the suicide, it is brash and it is dangerous and bold and brazen! It is mad, it is foolhardy!"

"She will not expect me, she will think I have run!"

"It is careless, it is of a risk, it is sinister—"

"And then, when she is laughing up her sleeve, when she is smiling at the thought of me galloping south with blank papers in my belt, la, I appear at the window, I go in, and her face falls!"

"It is insidious, it is of great chance, it is doom and death rolled into one—"

Du Maurier stopped his song of fear and frowned. He considered the thing a second and suddenly smiled.

"But on the other hand," he remarked suddenly, "it is magnificent, it is a gesture of wonder, it is genius! You take her by surprise, she is off her guard. You burn her hand with a candle, you threaten to put out her eyes with your sword, she must tell!"

"Wrong." Hamilton shook his head. "She will not tell. You can torture her and she wouldn't tell. You don't know her."

"You don't," replied Du Maurier, "know torture."

"I wouldn't like that," Hamilton said. "I think I can find out where they are. When you look at her face, you are hoodwinked. So this time I will hide her face and just look at her eyes. They say that truth always lies deep in the eyes and that you cannot stop the showing of it."

"Why," exclaimed Du Maurier, "it is the plan of a Frenchman!"

"Let's go back. Around this side. She may watch from her window, although I think not. Now."

CHAPTER XI

MILADY, THE SPY

THEY cut to the front of the house and ran back up the lawn. They were bold about it the second time, not bothering to hide themselves at all. When they reached the white bricks of the house, they were both panting a little.

"Around the side," Hamilton whispered.

They stole back to the rose-covered trellis once more. But up above them, the black hole which had meant an opened window now had a pale glisten to its shell of blackness, and they knew they were seeing the reflection of the moonlit night upon the glass of a window pane. The window was closed. It was also, unless Milady Desmond were inconsistent, locked.

"Gad!" Hamilton whispered. "She anticipated a return. She anticipates everything. There is nothing so bad as an anticipatory woman."

"Well, that is that. We can do no more here tonight."

"What?" Hamilton said. "You'd leave now? I've just begun!"

"But the window is locked. Would you break the glass and raise up the devil? She'd shoot you."

"Ah, René, I suspect the French are not an inventive race. There is her window locked. But here on the other side of the trellis is another window, opened."

"Non!" Du Murier said in horror. "You cannot do that."

"Of course I can. I'll go through this room, into the hall, and then enter her door within the house!"

"But this room with the open window is occupied?"

Hamilton shivered first, then nodded. "It is occupied by Miss Anne Norwood."

"No!" Du Maurier looked crushed. "You cannot take such a chance."

For answer, Hamilton swung up onto the trellis and started to ascend the woodwork. He called back, "This time, wait here, René, and I'll throw the papers to you. Just in case I'm not quick enough myself. You're not to stand around. When you receive the papers, get to your horse and ride back to town. I'll meet you at Caleb's."

"Si vous dîtes," Du Maurier said, resigned.

Hamilton waved to his friend, and then went on up. He made the open window and paused there, standing on the framework of the trellis and feeling the wooden slats groaning under his weight. A rose thorn stung his knee, and he thought what a fine tragedy it would be if the trellis broke and dropped him down on Du Maurier's anxious crown. But the trellis slats held safely enough.

Hamilton paused at the window and stuck his head in. The night outside was so much brighter than the darkness within. It took a few seconds for him to see. When he could see, there was nothing *to* see. From the window, only the foot of the bed was visible. So he listened, and he soon caught the sound of rhythmic breathing, and the tick-tock of a clock upon the mantel above the cold fireplace which had not been used for months.

"All right?" Du Maurier whispered hoarsely, looking up.

"Shh," Hamilton said, nodding, and from that height he had to smile at the bulk and length of the nose beneath him,

a member which stuck out from Du Maurier's sober face like a golden horn of plenty, tipped with moonlight and star-dust.

Hugging his cloak close to him so that it might not rustle too nosily, Hamilton swung his right leg up and over the sill of the window. It was not a large window and it was only opened half-way. He could not risk opening it farther because windows had a way of squealing in pain at the touch of a hand. So Hamilton inched his big frame in between the opening, and thought of himself as the meat between two halves of a sandwich.

In a moment, he was inside.

HE DID not go to the bed. There is something in the human soul which recognizes the presence of someone, even when the body sleeps. He skirted the bed, but he could not resist at least one glance.

She looked small and fragile. Her lovely face was turned away from him and toward the opposite wall, but he could see the back of her head plainly, with the hanging ringlets. They were coppery, those ringlets, even if the darkness changed their color. Anne Norwood's hair was the most burnished copper color he had ever seen. Her hands were folded quietly on her breast and she breathed shallowly.

He looked away again. He had to get on with it and not waste time. He crossed the room and went to the door. Slowly and carefully he inched it open. It squeaked, not too loudly, but it was a brash sort of door. All the fondling, all the care would not stop the tiny mouselike voice of the hinges. He finally notched it enough for him to slip his body through. Once out in the upstairs hall of the Norwood house, he could see decently. The glow of the candles downstairs in the reception hall touched off the upper ceiling with a luminescence which bounced all around the points of the compass with equal intensity.

But he did not dare close Anne Norwood's door. He had got out safely, the risk of that sound was too much. He left it open, and, hardly breathing, he moved down the hall to the next door along the way which was Milady Desmond's.

Edith Desmond doubtless was awake. Was the door unlocked? He could find out by turning the knob. But if he turned the knob and Edith Desmond heard it, and the door was locked, what then? He'd have to knock and she'd be suspicious because she'd know that he had tried to walk in before knocking. No. Best thing was to knock right away and take her with the element of surprise which was on his side.

He drew his pistol from his belt and held it firmly in his right hand. One long breath, and then three gentle taps on the door with the muzzle of the gun, a short breathless wait, the scurrying of dainty feet across the floor within, the door slowly opening enough to show one wary eye inside and then—

Hamilton was rough about it, rough and silent. He thrust the door open, knocked the derringer out of her hand with his left fist and almost made her eat the barrel of the pistol in his right as he shoved it into her face, forcing her back to allow himself to get inside the room and quickly close the door.

"John!" she said sharply, throwing her hand to her mouth, her eyes popping wide open at the sight of him. Hamilton could see the little goose pimples rise up along the flesh of her arm, and her face looked bloodless in the half-light. It was the only time he had seen her shocked.

"Yes, my dear," Hamilton said. "It's I again. You didn't expect me back so soon, did you? You gathered I would not examine the papers, that, doubtless, I would be on the road to Richmond right now with the blank papers. Even so, you took the precaution of locking your window, in case your little plan went wrong. But there are other windows, Milady. *Don't move.* We'll let the derringer lie where it is."

"You fool, you fool!" she said fervently. "Why did you come back? You'll get yourself murdered! I can't give you the papers,

I can't do it, no matter if you kill me! For the sake of heaven, John, get out of here and be on your way, forget the papers, forget me!"

"And why are you so concerned for me?"

"Because Caxton is here! Rolph Caxton! He'll not hesitate to kill you on sight. And if you came through another room, you'll have disturbed the sleeper. The whole house will be up!"

"Caxton isn't here. You're tricking me again. He left this evening."

"But he came back later, after nightfall."

"I don't believe it. You lie so exquisitely. I was telling a friend of mine that your face hides a lie but that the eyes cannot. Will you do me the favor of taking a kerchief from that table and binding it around your face?"

"Don't be a fool, John. Please go."

"Would you have me tie it myself? I don't want to hurt you."

"All right," she whispered, "I'll tie your handkerchief. But be still, be quiet—"

"One moment," Hamilton said. "You carry a dagger. I want to see it."

SHE paused and stared at him and she could not meet his eyes. "I am not ashamed of my dagger," she said quietly. "You expected me to be ashamed of it. But if men carry swords, why not women a dagger? They are both deadly."

"Precisely," said Hamilton. "You see my sword. I wish to see your dagger. That makes us stand on even ground." He stooped and scooped her derringer from the floor and dropped it in a pocket.

"You think the papers are in the dagger?"

He shrugged. "Probably not. But if I know where the dagger is, I know it will not find itself in my stomach suddenly without my expecting it."

She paled and gasped. "Do you think I would do that to *you?*"

"My dear," said Hamilton quietly, "I personally do not want to believe it. But what can I think? Everything you have told me is a lie. Every fact you represent turns into hoax. You are too clever and I am only a dull and stupid country boy who is just remembering that there is something missing from you tonight, and perhaps that explains where the papers are. But first the dagger."

She walked to the table and lifted her bag. From it she extracted the dagger. It was a tiny thing, really, with a blade no longer than a tiger's tooth, but more broad. Its steel was highly polished. Its grip was mother of pearl, and the hilt was copper with a copper guard. Hamilton strode to her and snatched it from her hand. He tapped the grip but it was solid, not hollow. She watched him, troubled.

"John—will you go, for the last time, will you go?"

"No."

"You're asking me to be the death of you! Can't you understand I don't want that?"

"I understand only that you are cleverer than I, and that therefore I must be the more careful."

He reached for the bag and put the dagger back into it. Edith Desmond ran to him, hung close to him and put her face against his shoulder. "Darling, darling," she cried, "please go. I beg you to go."

"I'll go with the papers."

"You don't know where they are,. I shan't tell you where they are. It's hopeless, can't you see it? But soon some one will hear us—"

"Let them hear," he said stubbornly. "I want the papers."

"John." He turned. She still hung close to him but now she raised her hands and turned his chin down so that his face was very close to hers, and their eyes only a few inches apart. "John, listen." Her voice was level, soft and steady. A muscle twitched in her cheek. She was fighting to say what she had to say, and she was in deadly earnest. "John, I'm older than you, four years older than you. When a woman is older than a man, she

always feels ridiculous, somehow, to have fallen in love with him. I have fallen in love with you. I say it. It is rather humiliating for me for two reasons. I am not only older than you, but I know that you do not love me. Oh, you have been fond of me through our intimacy, but you are not in love with me, you could not be in love with me. That is true, you needn't deny it nor affirm it. I know."

"Well?" Hamilton said in a hushed tone.

"I love you enough to want you to live," she said, touching his cheek. "You have a lot to live for. If you died here on my account, I'd want to die too. I can't give you the papers, not even if it cost me my life. That is a trust with me, it is my duty. When it comes to that, we are enemies, you have your pistol, you may shoot me. At the same time, the papers stay with me."

"You tricked me," Hamilton said.

"What has that to do with love? Would you have tricked me, if you were a spy and needed the plans?"

Hamilton shrugged. "Yes."

"You know I'm right, my dear. So go away from here. Go away from me. Kiss me once more and then let me forget you, let me make you a face in my past."

SHE pulled his head close and kissed him gently on the mouth for a long time. When she released him, he smiled.

Edith Desmond said, hurt, "Am I funny then?"

"No," Hamilton said. "You are rather fine, I think. I have always thought so. I smiled because I have remembered."

"Remembered what?"

"Well, that night at The Whistling Oyster, for instance. That was the night I met you and when I burst into your room, the scent of you was all around the place, the wonderful scent of jasmine in the air. Tonight it is gone."

"Yes," she said. "Tonight it is gone. But then everything is gone from this night forward."

"You are a true *aficionado* of Thespia," Hamilton said, feeling better and smiling more broadly. "But while you speak in thoughts, I speak in things. The perfume, the jasmine, is not here tonight. You have not used it upon yourself. Shall I tell you why?"

She looked at him sharply, her face turning hard.

"It is not used tonight," Hamilton said, "because you have spilled it, spilled it away purposely to make room in its faceted bottle for a more important scent —the scent which leads to the trail of General Washington. Eh, are you ill, my dear?"

"Leave here, I warn you!" she said sharply.

"You see, Milady, what you have done is not so clever this time. You have lost the glory of jasmine for the sweat of a column of soldiers. You have dispensed with your perfume to make a hiding place for the plans I cherish so adamantly—"

Edith Desmond wheeled like a flash and ran for the side-table. She caught up the faceted perfume bottle in her hands, but Hamilton reached her at the same time, snatched it from her and as she struck at him blind, he pushed her away with force and she fell onto the bed. She was up in an instant and dashed at him, striking at his face, and he pushed her away a second time and started for the door.

"Stop!" she said. "Stop, John, or I'll fire! I mean it!"

Hamilton stopped and turned. "By the Lord," he said in amazement, "you die harder than a rattlesnake! Did you steal that gun of yours out of my pocket again?"

She had. She was holding the derringer on a line with his heart. "Put the bottle back, hurry, I warn you!"

"This time, my dear," he snapped, "*you* will have to do the killing for I do not intend to give the bottle up," and he hurled it through her closed window where it broke the glass with a crash and disappeared into the night.

He dove for the floor as she pulled the

trigger of her gun. There was a crash of fire and a blinding pall of smoke, but it pleased Hamilton to note that the flame shot straight up. She had not aimed at him, she had shot at the ceiling to rouse the house.

Hamilton dashed for the window and kicked the remaining pieces of glass from the pane so that he could pass himself through. He was working frantically at it when Edith Desmond screamed, *"John!"*

Instinctively he ducked to the floor again as the voice of a pistol cracked sharply and a pistol ball buzzed over his head like an angry bee. From the ground, he turned his head and saw the figure of Major Rolph Caxton in the doorway with the smoking gun in his hand.

"My frog of Brattle Hill!" Hamilton roared. "Another time when I am not so pressed! It hurts me to lose this opportunity!"

"If you make one move," Caxton grated, "I'll put this other ball through your skull!"

"You won't!" a new voice cried. "Raise your hands in the air, Major! If you don't I warn you, I'll shoot!"

IN THE confusion, Hamilton felt dizzy. He whirled toward the new voice as Caxton dropped the gun and raised his hands. By the beard of Jupiter, no less, there stood Anne Norwood at the door which opened between her bedroom and Milady Desmond's, and she was holding one of her father's dueling pistols in a shaking hand and standing, erect, pale, and terrified, holding the muzzle on Caxton. It was a splendid, wonderful thing somehow, and she looked like a painting as she stood there, her copper hair down around her neck, her face so white in the darkness.

"Anne!" Hamilton said. "You save *me?"*

"Run, John," she said. "Run and begone! Hurry!"

"But you do this for me? After the things you said, after what has happened?"

"You're trapped," she said, her mouth trembling. "I would save a dog in a trap."

"You love me!"

"I hate you! Oh, please, John, hurry, get away from here before some one hurts you!"

"No one," said another new voice, from the broken window this time, "will hurt him! I, Comte René Du Maurier, Comte de Chauville, will see to that!" And there was the peninsula of a nose sticking in the window and looking for all the world like the barrel of the gun beside it. "I could not leave, *mon ami,* I heard the shots, the cries, so I too climb the trellis. Let us get out of here, *pardieu!"*

Hamilton skipped across the room and caught up Anne Norwood's hand and kissed it. *"Au 'voir,"* he said, and then climbed out the window and followed Du Maurier down the trellis.

Once on the ground, they ran like the wind for the glade. A rifle from the house barked loudly once but the ball went far afield. "We have stirred up a hornets' nest behind us," Du Maurier chuckled. "Have yourself a look this time. A tomb no more, eh, old one?"

The Norwood house was ablaze with candlelight and out on the grounds were the guards, half-asleep, running around wildly.

Hamilton laughed. He felt wonderful. "You should not have climbed the trellis, René. They might have caught you too."

"I could not resist."

"It was dangerous!"

"But what a gesture! How like a Gascon! Quick—here are the horses!"

They mounted and galloped off down the road toward Winchester, the red dust rising behind them like a veil of smoke. "Ah," Du Maurier chanted as they rode, "what a night of wonder! I have them here, John, the real plans! All is well now! We have only to ride hard! They will follow us!"

"She loves me," Hamilton said. "She saved my life! Or thought she did. The old dueling pistol probably wasn't loaded

anyhow. She doesn't know how to load a gun. But the gesture, as you say! Ah, my Anne!"

"Women protect what they dearest love," said Du Maurier. "So kindly remember milady. She dearly loves these papers. Only *le bon Dieu* knows what she will do now! We must strike south at once!"

"No," Hamilton said. "They will chase out after us right now. Let them go. We will spend the night at Caleb's. In the morning when the trail is cold, we will go south again, and there will be no one on our heels. Then all we will have to do is reach Richmond."

"Eh?" Du Maurier said drily. "All we have to do is reach Richmond. And, *morbleu, monsieur,* what else *have* these plans been trying to do for the last two weeks? It is not as simple as it sounds."

"She loves me!"

"Ah! You are mad as a hare!"

The dust swallowed them up as they vanished in the dark.

CHAPTER XII

TWO WOMEN IN DISGRACE

IT WAS late in the morning, ten o'clock at least, when Milady Edith Desmond's coach rolled down the road past the front of the white brick Norwood mansion, and out on to the road toward Winchester. The sun was climbing, the day was soft and warm, and the Virginia grass preened itself green and fresh in the light of day, still wet with the dew of the past night.

Nobody waved goodbye to the coach as it left the Norwood plantation, the reason was obvious. Up atop the coach now rested two grips instead of one. Edith Desmond was not riding alone. She had a companion now, and the companion was Anne Norwood. That was why the coach had passed from the grounds without farewells. Anne Norwood was in disgrace.

She sat in the bouncing tonneau of the coach, tossing on the cushions as the road grew rough, and she did not say a word. Her face was a trifle pale, and her mouth compressed tightly. She was a sensitive girl and the cold goodbye had left her hurt. She had always been afraid of her grandfather anyhow, and the scene with him had been unbearable.

Hardflint Norwood, the townsfolk called him. And he was that, hard as flint. Eighty years old, proud, sharp, a little bibilous, and one to remember a malice and nurse it through the years. Old Man Norwood was reactionary to the core, he believed in aristocracy and the power of kings with his heart and soul. It was not convention, nor even tradition so much with him, as it was breeding. Eighty years of it and a man is bound to believe he is right. Hardflint Norwood had happened to live too long for his own good. The times had changed and he could not change with them. The result was a bitter and acrid octogenarian, whose senses, unfortunately, remained keen and sharp and did not dull into the twilight of a second childhood where old men, thought sometimes senile, are often charming.

He had not said too much to Anne Norwood. He did not have to say much. Her father had died a long time before, and it had been her mother's poor luck to be born humble. Old Man Norwood's easiest insult was to accuse her of her mother's traits. "It was a low and vulgar thing, Miss Anne," he grated bitterly. "Your natural instincts should have shown you a better way, miss. To stand and hold a gun was ill-mannered and unwomanlike enough, but to threaten death upon the person of my own guests, to cover the retreat of a murderous rogue who but a day or two ago ran through your own blood brother."

"George slapped him," she cried hotly.

"And why not? Had I been younger, I'd have slapped him myself! He insulted this house. He insulted you!"

"He was only impetuous, believing in his cause!"

Old Man Norwood's eyes flashed fire and his white-haired head dipped forward toward her, his face bleak and hawklike,

his mouth cold. "What is the day coming to," he said harshly, "when even ladies would argue with their elders?"

She bit her lip and was silent.

"Have you anything to say to excuse this folly?" he asked, and his tone was insolent.

"The gun wasn't loaded," she replied, knowing it was a childish thing to say, but wanting to say something.

"I see," he said, "that you have yet to learn the difference between fact and principle."

"But, grandfather—"

"I did not ask you to speak again."

He sat back and stared at her. She sat opposite him, prim as a poker, pale, humiliated. She knew this little trick. He would sit there now for minutes and just stare at her, covering her with his cold eyes. It was part of punishment, his insolent and mocking stare while she could do nothing but sit and try not to move under the withering power of those gray eyes.

At last, Norwood said sharply, "Miss Anne, you have displeased me very much. The fact that you are of age does not allow you an equality with elders. I must remind you that you are penniless without my pleasure. Your inheritance is in my hands which makes me, between the two of us, the one of authority. I suspect you will moon secretly here and wait for your rogue to visit with you again."

"That's not true," she cried.

"I think it true," he said. "It is what I think which matters and you should know that. You appear to have forgotten it. And so, my dear, I am taking the liberty of sending you to Richmond. You are to stay at the home of your Aunt Corbina until I send for you. It happens that Milady Desmond has changed her plans. Instead of going on to New York, she is returning southward and thence east to Richmond. I am trusting you to her care. I do not care to be disobeyed in this matter, nor even to hear your protest. Turning you out of this house, as was necessary with your mother who fell in common ways, would be painful to my pride, but I warn you, I shall do it, or be obeyed."

A long pause, and then capitulation: "Yes, grandfather."

THE coach passed through Winchester and rolled south, its hind wheels building up a column of red dust which rose off the pike like a hurricane cloud, sullen and angry. The road was better here and the coach did not sway as much. Beside the driver, this time, there were two armed guards. There had been no apparent necessity for armed guards when Milady Edith Desmond rode north. Riding south was something else. The armed guards were there because Lady Desmond was afraid.

She was afraid of the man with the nose of an anteater, the man who had, but briefly, appeared at the tail-end of the mêlée in her room at Norwood's Comte René Du Maurier. He was only a little man but the asp is small too, and just as deadly. He was homely and he did not look very bright, but even the rhinoceros, so much the same in face, knew how to thrust. That nose, like an elephant's trunk was ridiculous, but his memory was like the elephant's also, and that was not funny.

Yes, Comte Du Maurier owed Lady Desmond a little debt; and she was afraid.

Edith Desmond paid little attention to the girl beside her. There was a coldness between them which was at once apparent. Anne Norwood had heard too much through the walls of the room after Hamilton's passage past her bed awakened her. She had heard enough to hate this woman next to her. And as for milady, the girl was too unimportant to be bothered with. It was not a case of dislike or hate with her, it was simply a case of ignoring the girl. She had her own problems.

She was thinking of Major Rolph Caxton and what he might say to Lord Cartwright and Sir Gerald Mackey. It had been bald enough, her saving Hamilton from that bullet. But for her cry, it was likely

that Caxton would have killed or wounded Hamilton at the window. Caxton had not liked that cry of hers. But had not Lord Cartwright himself said that the American should not be harmed because of his brother, Titus, who was rich and powerful in the valley, and could feed the armies?

Still, she could not get Caxton out of her mind. They hated each other and did not pretend. When they had been left alone following the mixup in her room, Caxton had said, "Milady, your customary compassion begins to make me wonder on whose side you are operating, we British or these Colonials. I am led to expect that this was all staged for my benefit, and I expect now that you will tell me the papers have been stolen by that stupid fellow."

"They have been stolen," she said, "but not by prearrangement! That is only an idea of your own mind, and its origin is as rotten as its creator!"

"You mean the plans *are* gone?" Caxton said in a deadly tone.

"Of course they're gone, you fool! What do you expect? Your Colonial is neither stupid nor dull!"

Major Caxton eyed her with a look of death. "Madame," he said and there was no mistaking his meaning, "I think you have finished your service with His Majesty's Intelligence. I think, indeed, you have completed your life span. You are changing your plans by my order. You are to go south by stage to Lace Falls. If Milord Cartwright has gone on to Richmond, you are to follow, then, to Richmond. I am detailing two guards to you to see that you do as I say."

"Major," Edith Desmond said, "what do you mean by it?"

"I simply mean," he said, "that I consider you guilty of treason, Milady, and that I shall inform Lord Cartwright of my suspicions and of the events leading up to their forming. I'm quite sure he will see it my way. Meanwhile, it is essential that we recover those papers. Milord told you how important a mission this was. Isn't it odd, on a simple thing like carrying papers to New York you fail, suddenly, having met a gay young blade who strikes your fancy. Whereas, in the past when the sinister head of love did not loom, you accomplished less important but more daring feats?" He smiled nastily. "Your treason would seem to cry that it was a *fait accompli.* I warn you, madam. My guards will have orders to kill if you try to change my plans. Richmond it is."

"LORD CARTWRIGHT will punish you for this!" Edith Desmond said, her voice steel. Her face had become very white.

"That we shall see," Caxton replied bitingly. "In Richmond."

"But if you are going after those papers," she said, smiling faintly, "we won't meet again, Major."

"Eh? And why not?"

"Because this stupid fellow, this dull rogue, this young romancer, this wild scoundrel you speak of, will cut your heart out if he meets you face to face."

Caxton laughed. "My dear, your head is turned by the lad. You overestimate his sword arm and, perhaps, forget the length of my own. No, I am afraid that Hamilton will hardly cut my heart out, and yet, I assure you this, that when I kill him, I will do it quickly and mercifully—"

"In the back, with a pistol?"

Caxton flushed and took a step toward her. "I'll save my steel for him expressly! Now mind you this, Milady! I ride south after Hamilton at once. You come south tomorrow. I am going to see Mr. Norwood at once and talk with him. There is an aunt in Richmond, a Corbina Norwood. I will try and impress upon Norwood the fact that his daughter may be planning a rendezvous in these parts with Hamilton and see if he won't send her south. If he does, she is to go with you."

"Why this?" Lady Desmond asked.

"A little bait," said Caxton. "If I should miss Hamilton, perhaps the presence of

his lady fair in your coach might tempt him into the open. In that case it is up to you to regain those papers. I might add, madam, that the arrival of the papers in Richmond upon your person might spare you your life for this one indiscretion. But I can assure you that if you arrive without them, your life will be forfeit."

"You hope."

"You flatter me." He bowed. "Withal, I think my oratorical powers and the facts themselves may make up Milord Cartwright's mind to that effect. A spy who is a traitor might just as well be dead. You've been warned, Milady. You might pray that Miss Norwood, in your coach, lures young Hamilton back to you again. Only this time, my dear, do not be indiscreet, nor give away your favors, both personal and military, quite so easily."

"Are you quite finished?" she said evenly.

"Quite." He smiled nastily. "Then I'll see you in Richmond."

"Yes," she said, "in Richmond. And there, before I live or die, perhaps we two can have a rendezvous." He looked down and saw that she was playing with the little dagger of the pearl-handle. He fell back and watched her sharply. "And when we do, Major, perhaps I may teach you why they call me La Tournada."

He laughed hollowly. "My sword is longer, Milady."

"But not as stealthy," she replied. "Wait for this, Major. I promise you, one day it will come."

He set his jaw, laughed again humorlessly, and went out.

Still, there was truth in what he had said. Edith Desmond knew it now as they rode south in the coach beside Anne Norwood, the feet of the two guards up above clattering on the boards now and then, their pistols noisily banging at their belts.

To all appearances, to the hard and cold eyes of her examiners, to the jury at a trial, the facts were damning. Caxton had heard her admit her love for Hamilton. Hamilton had made off with the papers. What other conclusion could you draw, other than she had deliberately given Hamilton the orders?

She mused on the thing and it came to her that she had once read the line somewhere, "That which most we love, destroys us in the end." It was an anticlimactic line and she had never believed in it, but now, here, riding south out of Winchester, it was proving true.

Along the way too, she kept looking for Caxton's men. He had also said to her, "There is a chance that this Hamilton rogue is wiser than we think. He may possibly delay his flight for Richmond until tomorrow, thereby hoodwinking us tonight into a chase for a phantom. To checkmate that, the highway tomorrow will be studded with ambuscades. I will have men hidden all along the route to Richmond. And if, perchance, Hamilton and Du Maurier come along later than I, or even you, my men will take care of him."

"Lord Cartwright said he was not to be harmed!"

"Lord Cartwright," replied Caxton, "did not know then that the lad was in league with the most dangerous of the American spies, the long-nosed count."

But on the whole ride as far south as the Hearthstone Inn at Woodridge, Edith Desmond saw no ambuscades, no hired men, no British soldiers, no Caxton, not even a quivering blade of grass or brush which might hide the pistols and rifles of a murderous trap.

John Hamilton, however, was not so fortunate.

CHAPTER XIII

A MESSAGE FOR LAFAYETTE

HAMILTON slept late the next morning after the wild night at the Norwood house. And when he slept late, the papers he had recovered slept late with him, for now they were strapped to his leg above the boot and beneath his trousers so that it would have taken the

hands of a ghost to pluck them away without awakening him.

He finally arose, saw the sun was well up, and he got out of bed and washed. The sound of a whipping sound, singing as it passed to and fro, reached his ears. It was the sort of sound that would have reached his ears above other sounds. He sprang to the window and looked out into the back yard of Caleb Woodstock's homely house.

Beneath him, Hamilton saw René Du Maurier. Du Maurier was circling a figure in a running attack. His unsheathed sword glittered in his right hand as he bore in and the sweat was dripping from the tip of the nose which God had so abundantly bestowed upon him.

Hamilton watched, smiling broadly.

Du Maurier's face was utterly intense and he watched his each and every move like a hawk. The movements of the sword were superbly executed, and Hamilton suddenly realized that there was something of his own style in this swordplay below him.

Du Maurier's opponent was a scarecrow, hung upon a short pole, with a stick extending from one arm. Du Maurier fenced against this stick and was working hard.

Hamilton finally went downstairs and out into the yard. He stood there in silence for a bit and finally cried, "Run him through, *mon vieux!* He is wide open there!"

Du Maurier instantly turned and his face was beet-red, not so much from the exercise as from being caught at this sort of play. "Ah, John," he said, ashamed, "you have caught me when I did not wish to be caught. I am of an embarrassment!"

"I should think so," Hamilton said. "Why fence with a scarecrow? If you want practice, we can use the foils at times."

"You do not understand," Du Maurier said, rubbing his nose. "I was not just fencing. I was making myself invulnerable. But I blush, I am ashamed. I must tell you the truth."

"You feinted like I do," Hamilton said accusingly. He was enjoying the flush in Du Maurier's face.

"That is true," said Du Maurier. "My friend, I trust you have a kind and loving heart. What I must confess is this. I have been practicing from you."

"From me?"

"*Oui.*"

Hamilton scowled darkly and watched Du Maurier squirm. It was delightful. "You mean, *monsieur,* that you have been copying my style with the rapier. You have been stealing my genius!"

"Alas," Du Maurier said in disgrace, "it is true." He hung his head and would not meet Hamilton's eyes. "Your feint, three times, fast like a wasp, I coveted it."

"Well now," Hamilton said, his eyes twinkling. "How shall I take this? Do I understand that you wish to learn my feint yourself so that when we meet again, possibly, at some future time, you will be able to kill me?"

DU MAURIER shot his head up and appeared to grow inches. A look of horror was upon his homely face. "I kill you?" he cried. "You think that is why I do this with your feint? *Par le bon Dieu,* I would cut my throat first! Fight with you? I would offer you my heart on a platter before I drew upon your body with my sword!"

"Then why?"

"I envy you the feint," said Du Maurier. "With your feint, I feel myself invincible. But I have been in bad taste. I am sorry."

Hamilton laughed hard. "Ah, René, you old fool!"

"I, a fool?"

"Of course! I myself have practiced the way you let your sword drop without pressure against your opponents. It is a fascinating thing, the lack of weight your sword holds in combat. That feather touch, that brushing parry, barely perceptible. It is remarkable!"

"*Monsieur,*" Du Maurier cried. "You have copied *me!*"

"And you me!"

"Ah well," Du Maurier sighed. "It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Perhaps we had better eat our breakfast and be on our way."

Caleb Woodstock had routed out Ferdinand and Sam Dixie and the group now sat down to eat a breakfast of myriad wheat cakes, bacon, syrup, and spoon bread which the woodsman cooked in a little portable Dutch oven. It was a delicious meal, and they ate it to the last crumb and, finishing, noted that the sun was up high now, and that it was growing late.

"There are a few things," Hamilton said, "we must decide now. First, we are going to Richmond. Second, we must deliver these papers, either yours, René, or mine, to General Lafayette there. Third, René and I will each start off carrying the papers. Should something happen to either one of us, or both of us, the survivors are to take the papers and ride on to Richmond. Stop at nothing. Understood?"

"Richmond o' bust!" Sam Dixie said.

"That's right, Sam. And how about Ferdinand?"

"He comprehends slowly," Du Maurier said, "but he has got the point." Ferdinand nodded vigorously.

"We all'd better be gettin' on the way," said Caleb Woodstock. "Growin' late."

"Cal!" Hamilton exclaimed. "You too?"

"Reckon so," Caleb said. "Yuh ain't got a decent rifleman in the lot. With muh sidearms and Black Joe here"—he patted a long rifle which was meticulously polished—"man kin do a lotta damage."

"Fine!" Hamilton said. "God bless you for this, Cal! Then let's be on our way. One more thing, should we be separated, or wounded and live to tell the tale, we'd better have a rendezvous again at some spot."

"Thar's a place near Richmond herself," Caleb said. "Know the man who runs it. The Powder Horn. It's American. Pete Jaffe opened her up las' year."

"What's the village?"

"Spear's Ridge. Pete Jaffe is a white man. He'd hide a Colonial from King George hisself."

"All right," said Hamilton. "It shouldn't take us three days to reach Lafayette in Richmond if we are ever going to reach him. Today is Wednesday. Three days makes Saturday. We will all meet again at the Powder Horn in Spear's Ridge on Sunday, should we become separated. Understood?"

"It is," René Du Maurier said. "And now to horse!"

WINCHESTER heard the clattering hooves in a twinkling and then saw the dust of their wake and tasted it for the hour. The red ball rode south, high dust, thudding shoes upon the sod, the high snorts of the horses, a flash of color. Carteret crouched back from the highway as the juggernaut rolled through, filling the town with the rush of wind and leaving the stray dogs barking in the streets, while some attempted to join in the chase and quickly and shamefully were outdistanced. Soldiers' Bluff was a blur, a quick vision of scattering fowl, of a frightened farmer shaking his fist, and then they were gone. In Gravesend, a toper who had started the day straight on a bottle burst into the local barber shop crying that he had seen the horsemen of Revelation, the four of them, war, famine, conquest and death, but by the gods, he could not understand what the fifth one, who was as black as night and looked like Satan, was doing in the clan.

Though they rode hard, the horses were standing up fairly well. John Hamilton rode in front with René Du Maurier close on his left flank. Then came Caleb Woodstock on whose flank galloped Ferdinand. And in the rear, hanging onto his saddle horn for dear life, came Sam Dixie.

René Du Maurier kept his eyes on the road, shielding them from the hot sun with the broad brim of his large hat, its white plume flying madly in the wind. But John Hamilton did not watch the road at all. He let Bony do that. Bony

had always been a careful lady and it was not like her to trip upon a stone or thrust her leg into a hole. She could take care of both herself and her master. So Hamilton watched the sides of the road, peered deep into the natural camouflage of low-hanging trees, past the berry bushes and brambles where men might lurk. It was interesting to note, too, that Caleb Woodstock did the same thing. His gray hawk eyes, sharp and squinted, watched keenly from beneath the fur of his coonskin cap as he spotted for a possible ambush. The fringes of his brown buckskin suit whipped back as he rode, and his powder horn and pistols bounced on the rise of the gallop with his body. The long rifle lay in a home-made buckskin scabbard along the belly of his horse.

Past noon, the town of Woodridge showed itself far down the curling southern pike, placid and warm in the sun, just past zenith. They saw it and were heartened. They had come a long way without the slightest interruption or accident. The horses were tired, the hard ride in the saddle had them all aching a bit, and here was a place to water the horses and procure a quick piece of lunch.

As the hanging sign of the Hearthstone Inn approached, René Du Maurier called over to Hamilton, "Will we stop here, my friend?"

"We ought to," Hamilton called back, "but we'll have to see, René! It's Tory! They may have set a trap here! Caxton knows the place!"

But the Hearthstone Inn looked innocuous enough. A rooster strutted in the front yard, pecking at seeds on the ground and wandering cockily beneath the legs of a droopy horse tied at the hitching post. A boy was sweeping the flagstones lazily out in front. There were two great oaks which flanked the sides of the Hearthstone in majestic splendor. Even they moved lazily in the lazy heat of the day. Du Maurier said, *"Bien?"*

"Looks all right," Hamilton said, "but be careful when we turn in."

"But of a certainty."

THEY galloped up to the gate of the Inn and were reining in their horses to come to a halt when right behind him, Hamilton heard the resonant sharp crack of a gun and his ears rang from the closeness of the discharge. Before he could turn, he saw a man drop out of one of the two huge oaks, the rooster vanished with the same alacrity as the sweeping boy.

"Ride you dandies!" thundered Caleb Woodstock. "Them trees ain't bearin' acorns! They're bearin' men an' guns!"

He fired his second pistol and pulled another skulker out of the trees with the ball as Hamilton kicked Bony hard, and turned south again like the wind, the others following in his wake.

Instantly a fusillade broke out and the roar of the guns broke the noonday stillness and put the birds around the place to faster flight than the horsemen. Great blue-gray bursts of smoke blossomed from the leafy bows of the giant oaks, and the whizzing rifle balls laid themselves around Hamilton's ears as he rode the vanguard away.

Down the road, the route made a sharp curve and then bore down the valley toward Lace Falls. When they reached this curve, Hamilton knew that they were safely out of the range of the rifle balls from the Hearthstone and he quickly counted their number and saw that they were still five. He breathed a sigh of relief at their escaping unscratched and he was pressing Bony onward when they finally rounded the curve and found four horsemen waiting for them there.

It was a *cul-de-sac* de luxe, for the wily Caxton had planned upon their escaping the riflemen in the oaks, possibly, and had planted these other hosts in the road to meet them instantly afterward.

Caxton, however, had counted only upon the appearance of René Du Maurier and John Hamilton. He had told the horsemen this. So it is hard to say which of the two groups was greater surprised at the meeting, the Englishmen or the Americans. Certainly the English did not expect a band

of five raging horsemen, armed to the teeth, to come bearing down on them, and the sight gave them a cold turn which instantly decided the favor of the encounter. One of the Englishmen turned tail and fled on his horse. The others hesitated, and it lost them their lives.

Hamilton and the others were riding too fast to pull in and settle the thing with guns. It all happened in a flash, the Americans rode straight into the English and the mêlée, brief though it was to be, began. Hamilton heard Sam Dixie's knife whispering through the air and he saw the man it lifted out of a saddle, the blade burying itself deep in the chest. Hamilton himself got out his sword and beat his opponent—who was raising a pistol—across the face with it. The next instant the man fired, it was hard to see where, and then Hamilton caught him through the body with the blade. Hamilton turned for the last man but that fellow had already been stabbed in the right arm by Du Maurier and was galloping away to the north, shouting murder. They wasted no time, but instantly spurred their horses again and went on, Sam Dixie only waiting long enough to retrieve his knife.

But they had not gone many more miles when Caleb Woodstock called, "Wait, wait!"

Hamilton raised his hand and they stopped. "What is it, Cal?"

"Where's the Frenchman?"

"*Morbleu,* I am here," René Du Maurier cried.

"Not you, Count. Your servant. Where's Ferdinand?"

Ferdinand, in truth, had vanished. They could not, any of them, remember him after the encounter at the bend of the road. Hamilton thought of the single pistol shot and paled. Du Maurier remembered it too. They looked at each other. They said nothing.

"Should we go back and look?" Caleb asked.

Hamilton looked at Du Maurier. "Shall we?"

Du Maurier sighed grimly and shook his head. "Richmond," he said. "It is sad that lives do not matter in this thing, for Richmond is our destination and we must go on to there."

They galloped south again, but the five horsemen had become four, and Richmond was still a long ways off.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The inn-keeper quavered before Du Maurier's sword

The Rogue

By RICHARD SALE

BECAUSE John Hamilton of Virginia accepts the trust of a dying Colonial soldier, he is involved at once in the war of his country against the King. For that trust is a dispatch from Washington to Lafayette, a message which may mean the fate of the American Revolution in that year 1781. Neither chance nor General Washington himself could have chosen a better messenger than John Hamilton; already that young man's outspoken loyalty to the Colonial cause has broken off his relations with his Tory brother—and with Miss Anne Norwood, the girl Hamilton has intended to marry.

But the British want that message badly—and John Hamilton, is not to carry it for long. The wits of Major Rolph Caxton are matched against him, and—even more dangerous—the beauty of La Tournada, the spy who calls herself Edith Desmond. Hamilton's gallantry one evening wins him the company of the alluring Milady Desmond, and the next morning the papers are gone.

With his friend Count Rene Du Maurier, a fighting Gascon devoted to the Colonial cause, Hamilton pursues Edith Desmond and Major Caxton to the Norwoods' estate where they are spending the night. In the bedroom of Milady Desmond John Hamilton recovers the dispatch—and manages to escape with it only because of the unexpected aid of Anne Norwood, formerly his betrothed.

The next day Anne Norwood, in disgrace for her service to a Colonial, is sent off to Richmond with Edith Desmond. Miles ahead ride Hamilton and Du Maurier, bent on delivering the recovered message to Lafayette. Once they are ambushed by Britishers and the count's servant is killed, but they manage to escape. But Caxton will not give up, they know, and it is many miles to Richmond. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for June 11

CHAPTER XIV

A DOUBLE BAIT

THERE were no more ambushes that day. It was because of Hamilton's caution that they avoided at least one trap. Near Fairfield, he sent Sam Dixie on ahead into the town to look around. When Sam returned, he brought reports of foreign men and guns. So Hamilton led his party around Fairfield by way of the limestone caves near the Blue Ridges. It was a woods trail, faint and wild, and it lost them precious time, but the loss of Ferdinand decided Hamilton on the fact that no more should be wasted needlessly.

Thus, darkness had fallen by the time they galloped up to the summit of Brattle Hill.

Their speed had fallen off. The horses had been watered on the way but once at an old farmhouse, but the poor beasts had been pushed at a terrific pace and they were all in. They needed stables and food and sleep. Hamilton patted Bony's neck when she raised her ears at the familiar slope of Brattle Hill and led the others to the top.

"Gentlemen," Hamilton said softly, waving his hand at the spreading vista beneath them, "I am home again, however briefly."

There was no expression in his voice as he said it; no light welcome in his heart.

"Lawd," Sam Dixie groaned, "my bones done stuck to dis saddle lak dey never gwine to come apart agin."

The others said nothing. Caleb sighed once, the sight of the town of Lace Falls below the hill appealed to him. He had not had his belly full of fighting by a long shot, but he thought to himself that he would never enjoy a gallop again.

Comte René Du Maurier, silent, strangely morose, sat in his saddle, slumped like a broken man.

The moonlight was silver this night, faint and somewhat cold in spirit. It laid that coldness upon them. They should have been elated at having reached the halfway point alive, the papers for Lafayette still intact upon their persons. But they were not.

Hamilton stared dully at the town down the south side of Brattle Hill. Lace Falls slept there. From the summit, it was unchanged. Indeed, it had not changed at all from the time he could remember gazing at it from this same summit as a small boy. But to look upon it now, how could one guess that there was blood in the land, that to the east armies poised at each other's throats, that to the south men died in battle, that to the north soldiers shivered in the nights upon the Hudson and waited with Washington for retreat or advance, and the legions of General Howe, comfortably situated in New York?

Here and there the candlelight in the windows, for the hour was still early, but for the most part, the homes were dark.

"By gad," said Hamilton wearily, "a bed will feel good. We're in spitting distance of one. Let's not wait upon it." He touched Bony's flank and led the way down.

Main Street was deserted. At the corner of Main and Gage, Hamilton held up his hand without a word and they drew in their mounts.

"Où sommes-nous?" Du Maurier asked quietly.

"The Whistling Oyster," Hamilton answered.

"Eh, *bien?"*

"Dark. No chimney smoke."

"And that means?"

"Something has happened." Hamilton shivered. "I have not seen the Oyster dark since the night Arnold and his men rode in here."

"Mon Dieu," said Du Maurier weakly. "Not another trap. I am tempted this time to fall a prey, I am that fatigued."

"Courage, my Gascon," said Hamilton. "Sam—to the stables. See if you can find Ancil. Learn what is wrong, whether it is safe to put in here for the night."

"Yassah," Sam Dixie grunted. "But ah kin see a hawse in de yard raht now, Massa Jawn. He de bay, de gray bay."

"Dr. Jennifer's bay?"

"De same. Ah'll go. Yawl waitin' heah on me?"

"Right here. If it's a trap, yell."

"Lawd yas! When ah yell, dey gwine t'heah me up and ovah de whole o' Rockbridge County!"

SAM disappeared down the dark street on foot, leaving his horse behind him with the others. The shadows swallowed him alive. John Hamilton, Du Maurier and Caleb waited impatiently. They cast anxious looks around them but no soul ventured out at all, and the windows on Gage Street were all dark.

"See a light," Caleb said suddenly.

"I too," Du Maurier said, almost at the same time. "The inn, John. Upstairs."

"I see it," Hamilton said. "There's a man up there too. Wait—it's Dr. Jennifer. He raised the shade. But that's Fitzie's own room! Something has happened."

"This medico," said Du Maurier. "He is one to trust?"

"He delivered me when I was born," Hamilton said. "He is one to trust, René. Is that Sam?"

It was Sam. They could not see him until he emerged into the moonlight. He was as black as the shadows and formed with them perfectly. In the moonlight, he became a gnome with white eyes rolling in their sockets, his mouth hanging wide open. "Massa Jawn," he said hoarsely. "Come 'runnin' suh! Dey's been the gust o' hell blown loose round heah! Massa Jawn, 'taint no trap, it's de trut' and no mistakin' dat dere's misery at de inn!"

"Sam," Hamilton said sharply. "Stop blubbering! What is it?"

"Dey all kilt an' dyin' and ain't good fo' not'in' atall! Miz Kate, she gwine wit' de enemy! Oh, dey's hell heah, suh—"

"Come on," Hamilton said.

They galloped down Gage Street to the courtyard of the Whistling Oyster and they rattled over the rough cobbles and on back to the stables where they quickly dismounted. "Have Ancil take care of the horses," Hamilton clipped to Sam, but Sam said, "He ain't gwine take care no mo' hawses, Massa Jawn. Ancil, he daid."

"Dead?" Hamilton said, shocked.

"Daid," Sam said. "Yo' gwine in, ah take care de hawses. Massa Marcel, he inside."

"René, Cal, come on."

They left Sam Dixie at the stalls and ran for the rear door of the inn. There was a single candle burning in the kitchen and they burst in. Marcel d'Antibe, the chef of the Whistling Oyster, sat at the table with his head resting on one arm. He raised it at the sound and stared at them. "Ah," he breathed. "Upstairs, John, upstairs—"

Hamilton snapped, "Wait here." He left René Du Maurier and Caleb to talk with Marcel while he beat a tattoo upon the stairs with his boots and dashed to the upper floor. He went to Joseph Kilrain Fitzpatrick's room at once. He did not knock but entered.

First he saw the kind and withered face of old Doctor Dale Jennifer, standing at the foot of the big four poster. Dr. Jennifer showed surprise at the sight of him, controlled that surprise with admirable coolness, and then quickly raised a finger to his lips in a silent plea for quiet.

THE room was still, and very heavy. It was heavy with the weight of close death and filled to every nook and corner with the sound of labored breathing. The doctor's face was strained and tired and told the story more graphically than mere words could have. The open black bag, the instruments upon the nearby table, the bloodstained towels, and upon a white napkin the battered lead which had been a round pistol ball.

Hamilton, cold all over, came into the room so that he could see the bed. Fitzie lay there under a sheet, just his face

showing. It was hard to see where the sheet ended and the Irishman began. They were both of the same sort of whiteness.

Fitzie's eyes were half open but he could not see. His mouth hung open too and he fought for breath savagely. Hamilton shivered. He turned to the doctor and whispered, "Shot?"

"Through the left lung," Dr. Jennifer replied huskily.

"By whom?"

"I don't know, John."

"Will he live?"

"I don't know. I am doing the best I can, John. He's badly wounded. It's touch and go."

Hamilton set his teeth. "What happened, Dr. Jennifer? Who did all this?"

The doctor raised his hands. "I know almost less than you. A boy came for me—there had been fighting at the inn—I came at once, and I've been here since. It was around six o'clock when they called me. But Marcel can tell you the whole thing. He knows. He told me when I bandaged his arm but I could not understand him very well. I was too upset doubtless—"

"I'll be back," Hamilton said. "He turned, went out, and descended to the kitchen. The others were waiting for him. There had been talk, but Marcel had held himself in. There was a bandage around the chef's right arm with a little blood showing through it. He was very pale and taut, and he looked much thinner.

"Well, *monsieur,*" said Marcel quietly, "I have been wounded under fire. You are a welcome sight here."

"Marcel," Hamilton said, his voice shaking, "What has happened here? The place is a charnel house. Where is Ancil? Who shot Fitzie? And what has happened to Kathie? Where did you get that wound in your arm?"

"Questions avail you nothing, *monsieur,*" Marcel replied quivering a little, "if you do not let me answer."

"Quiet, John," said Du Maurier. "Let the Breton answer."

"Go ahead."

Marcel sat down again. "Forgive me. I must sit. The hole leaves in me a strange weakness. I have never been hurt before and it is an oddity with me. I do not know how to act."

"Talk, man," Hamilton grated, "talk!"

"*Bien.* I will talk, wild one. I will be brief first, and mouthy second. Ancil is dead, run through by that devil of a major whose sword is invisible. Fitzie is shot, struck down by the ball of the fop's pistol, the scum who called himself Sir Gerald Mackey. I am wounded, shot in the arm and thought to be dead by the old goat, Milord Cartwright, who lives on mutton and aims for the back. And Kathie"—he paused—"Kathie, *monsieur,* is where only *le bon Dieu* knows."

"Dead too?" Hamilton gasped in horror.

"*Non,* not dead. Alive, which may be worse. Alive and on the road to Richmond in the hands of those two, the devil and his lord!"

"And Sir Gerald Mackey?"

MARCEL rose and bowed politely. "I did not, *messieurs,* receive this memento in my arm for nothing. I am happy to report that Sir Gerald Mackey, may he burn in hell, lies out behind the stables with Ancil, his English skull split open from ear to ear. My skill with a cleaver, gentlemen. It was a twenty foot throw and most accurate."

"Marcel, Marcel," Hamilton said wearily, "we are all tired, have ridden a long way and found horror at the end of the ride where we expected to find friends and comfort. I beg of you to collect yourself and tell us what has happened that we may act!"

Marcel d'Antibe nodded sadly. "You can do nothing tonight, my friend. Sit and listen. When I have finished, I will fix for you a dinner, I am that strong and love you that much. . . . He came at five this evening, the murderous-faced major with the frog which lives deep in his throat. They called him by the name Caxton."

Du Maurier looked at Hamilton and they both unconsciously wet their lips and then looked back at the chef.

"This Caxton *canaille,* he was excited," Marcel continued in quiet tones. "He spoke with Lord Cartwright and this bedbug of a Mackey. He mentioned your name. He was in a fury. This much Kathie heard and told us, Fitzie and I, as we sat in the kitchen. Caxton asked of the others had they seen you or a Comte Du Maurier. . . . *Ce serait bien vous?"*

Du Maurier nodded.

"They said no," Marcel continued. "'Good,' says this major. 'They have not come then. Let us repair to a private room, we must discuss things.'"

"Go on."

"To the room they went. Kathie told us this and decided then to overhear their plans. She went upstairs to the room beside them and laid her ear against the wall. She was gone many minutes, and when she returned to us, *mon Dieu,* it was as if the plague had touched her beauty. 'They will kill him!' she cried. 'They lay traps to snare John and shoot him on the way to Richmond!' And she wept tears. 'Be brave, my lady,' I said, 'we will warn him if he comes.' 'He may not stop,' she said. 'I will ride out on the pike to meet him and warn him!' But Kathie spoke too loudly, *messieurs.* And suddenly, the door swings open! Ah, *sacristi,* what pain that was!"

Hamilton said, his face a mask, "Continue, Marcel."

Marcel gave a gallic shrug.

"It is the three of them," Marcel said. "They have come to leave, they are in a hurry, they wish their coach prepared. I do not know then but I suspect this Caxton of a major has overheard dear Kathie. Fitzie runs to Ancil and tells him to make ready the coach. It is made ready. We expect them to go. They appear suddenly in the kitchen. Major Caxton lays hands upon Kathie. 'Come, lass, we only spare your life because of youth, these others will not be so fortunate, it is the price one pays for having ears too big for their head!' And they make as if to drag her toward the coach."

"And then what happened?"

"Monsieur, Fitzie saw before him the veil of red like the bull sees the scarlet cape of the matador. He charged them, crying out in anger. *Pan!* A pistol! And Fitzie fell with the ball in his chest. *Pan! Pan!* Another pistol. And this time I fell with a ball through my arm and I lay still for fear of *un coup de grâce* which did not come. They must have thought me a corpse. They ran through the back door for the coach which Ancil had made ready and they dragged poor Kathie with them. She was a brave one, *cette jeune fille.* She did not cry out in the slightest and she fought with this Caxton like a wildcat and left upon his face the mark of her nails."

"I will meet him," Hamilton grated. "The day comes nearer. I will meet my frog of Brattle Hill."

"Continuez, Breton," said Du Maurier.

"I STIRRED," said Marcel. "I stirred and then rose. The ball in my arm pained, but it was surprising, I could move and did not faint. I went to the window and looked out. Ancil saw the little Kathie kicking and fighting and sprang to her defense with a rake. Ah, *c'est terrible!* This major, he drew his sword from its sheath and he trust so rapid, so fast that these eyes of mine could not perceive the blade until it had impaled itself through the heart of Ancil who crumpled into the dust, his own blood wetting the earth and cobbles. At that poor Kathie fainted full away and Major Caxton placed her quickly in the coach and climbed into the driver's seat. This Lord Cartwright climbed into the coach with Kathie, all white and shaking in his fright. But wait. This Sir Gerald Mackey had something else to do. It was his task to tie the major's horse to the rear of the coach so that the horse would run behind the coach."

"On," Hamilton nodded. "Finish with it."

"I saw Mackey with the horse, tying the bridle to the coach. The others were gone, inside the coach and up on the driver's seat but here is one left whom I may wreak upon a vengeance. I stagger to the meat block and raise the cleaver. I return to the window. I raise my arm, it is agony, I pale, I wince, and then I throw the cleaver. It splits his head from skull to throat. The major sees it, blanches, then whips the horses and goes off."

"Which way?"

"Richmond by the road of Spear's Ridge, and that is all."

"And all this how long ago?"

"It was six o'clock when they left."

"But it's only nine-thirty now. They've very little start. And in a coach! A horseman could catch up with them before morning." Hamilton rose. "René, you and the others will spend the night here and rest. I'm going on."

"That is foolish, my friend," Du Maurier said, laying a restraining hand upon Hamilton's shoulder.

"I can catch up with them," Hamilton said.

"Perhaps you can," said Du Maurier, "and then? You will fight them to save the young lady. And in what condition are you for such a gallop and such a fight. You are tired, your horse is exhausted, you would nearly die of fatigue in the chase. You might miss them in the dark, they may stay over at some inconspicuous inn along the way. And I do not want you to find Miss Kathie yet."

"Why not?"

"Because you are meant to."

"René, this isn't like you. You speak in riddles. What do you mean?"

"Why do you suppose that Caxton risked this mêlée to carry Kathie off? To spare her life because she was a girl? Bah! Caxton is an animal without compassion, he would not spare the life of his own grandmother without due cause. Think, John, think. He is making sure. A little sugar for the fly. He has laid traps for you all along the line, and this last trap is one to bait you in case you have escaped the others. There are three women in your life, *non?* So Caxton thinks also. One is a girl he may not touch, her family is powerful, her grandfather a Tory—"

"Anne Norwood."

"*Oui.* So he may not use her for bait. The other is a spy in his own cause. She is not worth the trouble because you avoid her instinctively and thus, there is one left. This Kathie. She is an inn-keeper's daughter. Her death at his hands would offend no one save her wounded father and—perhaps—yourself?"

"Well?" Hamilton said.

"But that is it! Do not you see? If you reach this inn, Major Caxton supposed you will learn of the holocaust and ride after him. You will catch up with him and you will have your chance to save this poor Kathie. And then?"

"Yes?"

"Then Caxton will place a gun against her brow and he will say to you, 'Monsieur Hamilton, your papers or her life.' And you will be able to do nothing but donate the papers. And, possibly see Kathie lose her life in the bargain for Caxton does not keep a word. A good spy cannot keep trusts with anyone, especially the enemy."

HAMILTON buried his head in his hands. "We must do something," he groaned. "I can't stay here, just sitting and doing nothing while that lizard takes her east. She is a girl, only a girl, a very pretty girl—" He stopped in horror. "They would not touch her?"

"John, John," Du Maurier said softly. "These thoughts do no one any good. You must reconcile yourself to the chase tomorrow. Not tonight. They keep this Kathie safe enough, she is their last chance at you if you should break through. She is valuable to them."

"But to sit here!"

"Yes, yes," sighed the comte. "How well I know the feeling. Think of me, *monsieur,* and the feelings which filled me this afternoon when we galloped off with my Ferdinand. Ah, he was a stupid fellow.

my Ferdinand, a lout and a knave but withal, a very kind and pleasant lout and knave who had been faithful to the core. Ah, *petit,* I am sorry for you! But do not you see that this other thing is greater than our private lives, that we must get these things to Lafayette at any cost. *Monsieur le Breton,* you they call Marcel! You loved her dearly, you fell wounded in the attempted saving of her, so I leave this decision to you. We carry papers to *le générale* which balance the fate of the American cause in their sentences. Should we abandon the safety necessary to their deliverance to risk our lives and our cause in the saving of *one* life?"

There was deep silence. Marcel his face, white and strained, finally rose. His voice cracked as he spoke but his words were firm enough. "*Non, M. le Comte.* You are quite right. He is right, John Hamilton. Sleep and food and rest, and at daybreak you ride to the east for the armies of Washington. That is the prime thing. The single lives, my own, yours, Kathie's, they do not matter in this bigger thing. It is what one gives for liberty, and I who speak, *monsieur,* am not even an American!"

"I agree," Hamilton said quietly. "Food, sleep, and we'll be off again at the crowing of the cock. But gentlemen, I bear you witness to this fact: those who have done this thing will pay for it with their blood."

Marcel coughed. "Then I must tell you, John. Although he did not take part in the fight at the inn, I know that your brother, Titus Hamilton, has gone to Richmond with this Caxton and Cartwright. He was seen by three witnesses when the coach crossed Main Street on the way to Spear's Ridge."

Hamilton lost some color, but set his jaw. "I do not retract," he said. "Blood may be thicker than water, but honor is thicker than blood. I tell you, they will pay for it. And so to bed, gentlemen. But first, let's have a bite of food." He smiled. "A bite of food prepared by the hands of the most wonderful chef in the western hemisphere, who, wounded though he may be, can never lose his *savoir-faire* with beef and lamb and the choice burgundies!"

Hamilton gestured.

And Marcel bowed solemnly.

CHAPTER XV

THESE DANGEROUS WORDS

ANNE NORWOOD was tired. When darkness fell, she dozed despite the bumping and the terrific pace of the coach. The gyrations threw her to and fro, but she was not used to coach travel and she slept a little. It had been hot and dusty all the way south. Lady Edith Desmond did not have to urge the driver on. The two men who Caxton had left to guard milady saw to that.

They had their instructions.

A stage could not compete in speed, of course, with a horseman. If Hamilton and his men were ahead of the coach, milady reasoned, there was little chance that the coach would ever catch up with them.

And yet, she thought, horsemen tired from such a ride, and horsemen would put in at night and sleep. If the coach kept on going, it might, conceivably, pass the horsemen and be ahead of them. Possibly, on the following day, they would all meet somewhere on the highway, and there would be a chance to recoup the papers. . . .

There was a layer of limestone on the pike which had risen up into the way from the constant deterioration of the clay atop it. The feet of men, the wheels of stages, and the hooves of horses, beating on the clay, had finally brought the layer to light. John Hamilton knew it well, as did Bony, and they each avoided it while on gallop. The driver of the stage did not know it, however, and his wheels struck it full, bouncing the coach harshly, and waking Anne Norwood from her uncomfortable nap. She sat up quickly and opened her eyes to find it night. Ahead of them directly loomed the body of

Brattle Hill. Anne said, "We're nearing Lace Falls, aren't we?"

"Yes," said Milady Desmond.

The name of Lace Falls conjured up an image in each of their minds which was identical.

"I'm very tired," Anne Norwood said quietly. "I'm not used to such travel by stage."

Milady shrugged. "I don't enjoy this rumble and roll too much myself."

"Will you stop in Lace Falls for the night?"

"No," said milady. "We are not stopping."

"Not stopping?" Anne Norwood gasped a little. "You mean we are to drive through the night this way? I can't bear the thought of it. Why must we hurry so? My grandfather didn't place a time limit upon my trip to Richmond." Her voice dropped. "It's bad enough to have to stay with Aunt Corbina, without rushing me into her presence like a bolt of lightning."

Milady shrugged again. "I'm very sorry, my dear, but it is I who am in the hurry. I am afraid you will have to be in a hurry with me. It is urgent that I reach Richmond as soon as possible."

"Then of course," said Anne Norwood bitterly, "we must not think of anyone else."

Her eyes smoldered.

Edith Desmond eyed her warily. "My haste is not due to any personal urgency, Miss Norwood. I happen to be in the service of His Majesty, King George."

"Then by all means," Anne Norwood replied coldly, "we must not disappoint His Majesty."

There was a silence in the coach for a moment. They reached the top of Brattle Hill, saw Lace Falls below them, placid and still in the night. And as they crossed the summit and started down the south side of the rise, Edith Desmond said slowly, "You hate me, don't you?"

"If I were a vulgarian," replied Anne Norwood evenly, "I would answer yes to that with feeling. But my manners do not allow me to hear such a question, much less answer it."

"Ah," Milady sighed, "I thought we might be frank. But, of course, there are manners."

"And breeding."

"*And* breeding. So important to a young girl. . . . How much did you hear at your door last night, my dear?"

"Enough."

"Doubtless. But how much?"

"You would have turned him over to the others, you would have had him murdered, for a packet of papers!"

Milady smiled. "So? That was all you heard? My threatening the young rogue?"

"It was enough, wasn't it?"

"But why should that disturb you? I was led to believe that Hamilton was unwelcome in your grandfather's house. Indeed your grandfather had threatened to shoot him on sight, so I understood. And as for you, I heard you mention Hamilton at dinner. You said you would enjoy the privilege of seeing him hanged."

Anne Norwood bit her mouth and said nothing.

"And as to my distasteful haste, I was also under the impression that you were a loyalist, a subject of His Majesty, who regarded the foreign-mongering and dictatorial Washington as a scoundrel? Surely you can forgive the sort of haste which will put down the rebellion and finish off the rapscallion rabble who hold General Washington so dear. Surely you can stand a bit of discomfort for the triumph of right."

Milady Desmond smiled, enjoying the baiting of the girl in a vague sort of way.

ANNE NORWOOD jerked her head erect and faced milady. "It is a woman's privilege to change her mind," she said coolly. "What is right? There's the point. We call them rabble, these soldiers of Washington. But they are more than that. Massachusetts scum, my grandfather calls them, but they are only Massachusetts farmers, just as my grandfather is a Virginian farmer. What makes the

Norwood family so unique? What sets it aside from a Massachusetts family with one small farmhouse and little stock?"

"Blood," said Milady Desmond.

"No," said Anne. "The bluest of blood is red when it is spilled. I understand that now."

Milady looked surprised. "You talk as one much older than you look," she said, and added soberly, "If you mean what you say, then this rabble of Washington's, any single man, is equal to your grandfather. And by that count, your grandfather is equal to the King himself!"

"And why not?" Anne asked. "What makes them different? They are both men born into a man's world. They call one a king, the other a farmer. Still another might be an inn-keeper or a cobbler. There is only one thing different about them: their wealth. But certainly their birthrights are the same, they each have rights to fraternity and equality and liberty!"

Milady Desmond gasped. "Are these your own words?"

"I heard them said one night," Anne Norwood replied. "I am but beginning to agree with them."

"They're Hamilton's words, I'll wager that!" Milady said. "They have his sound. They preach democracy. Democracy! My dear, keep such words in the darkness of your mind. Were you to say them aloud in London—even New York—your head, pretty though it is, would grace the point of a pike before morning!"

"A symbol of freedom then."

"Torn, ragged, horrid, bloody—"

"But proud!"

Milady watched the girl sharply, her face a trifle troubled. The coach rolled down the Main Street of Lace Falls, it tires clanging noisily upon the cobbles. The Inn of the Whistling Oyster down Gage Street was barely visible for a moment in the darkness, a single candle in an upper window. Then it had been passed, and the coach rolled on to the crossroads whence it swung to the east and the highway for Richmond. And behind in that darkened inn slept two men whom milady would have given her beauty to reach, Du Maurier and John Hamilton.

It was coincidental, too, that the hour was one in the morning and that Joseph Kilrain Fitzpatrick, stricken with the wound in his chest, opened his eyes for a moment at the sound of the wheels up on Main Street, the wheels of milady's coach. Dr. Jennifer came to the bedside where Marcel already sat, fatigued and despondent. "His chariot!" Fitzie whispered. " 'Tis the chariot of the reaper come to collect my bones."

"Non, non, mon ami," Marcel replied softly. "It is only a passing stage, Fitzie. You are going to get well."

"On the contrary," Dr. Jennifer whispered in awe, "he has died, Marcel. It is over."

SAM DIXIE was left behind. They had to do that. Marcel was too weak to take care of the inn himself; there were burial arrangements to be made and executed. Marcel needed another man. Hamilton said that Sam would have to be it.

So it was that the four horsemen became three: Caleb Woodstock, René Du Maurier, and John Hamilton. And ten o'clock of the following morning found them well on the way to Richmond via the Spear's Ridge pike.

It was a raw sort of day, the wind had changed and a misty drizzle filled the air. The sun which had warmed and overwarmed them for the last few days had vanished behind the gray and angry storm clouds which hovered high up in the Blue Ridge peaks and hid the summits from sight in the swirling scud above.

The grim weather put a grimmer touch upon the already burdened souls of the three horsemen. They galloped into the rain with their faces set. Hamilton's rawboned features had grown old overnight. Water dripped from his ears and nose and he was drenched completely. The brisk wind painted his hands faint purple.

"What wretched rain and fog!" Du Maurier called once. "It makes my bones ache! It is London over again!"

Hamilton made no reply. He rode in dead silence, his face taut and strained, his eyes fixed ahead on the road which stepped itself in the whistling wind and stinging mizzle.

"John, my friend," Du Maurier said, riding closer to him.

"René?"

"This does no good, this sorrow in your eyes. You could not help him."

"But he's dead," Hamilton said tonelessly. "Poor old Fitzie!"

"True, true," said Du Maurier. "And yet other men have died, are dying now, John. Men like Fitzie who would not step upon a cockroach nor crush to death a fly. They are dying. It is the price of liberty and freedom. Men have frozen to death—there is Valley Forge. Men have marched with bleeding, shoeless feet—there is Trenton. Men have fought when hopelessly outnumbered—there is Lexington. Today we live, tomorrow we may die. Spear's Ridge or even Richmond. It is the price. This liberty we cherish, it comes dear, *mon ami.* Its cost is blood upon the sod. It is for you, John, and your generations. Me, I do not count. I am not even *un Americain.* And yet I too fight, I too risk my life, my limbs, my fortune. With me it is an ideal. The right to speak, the right to live, the right to worship God as I wish."

"If this liberty for which we fight comes so dear," Hamilton said, "may God will that men cherish it in the years to come, remembering its price. For tyrants will come again, like George; they have appeared back before Caesar, these despots who would rule men as emperors and kings, and dictate their will upon the wills of others."

"I think America will remember," Du Maurier said.

THEY came upon the Old Mill Tavern a little past noon. The drizzle had changed into a slashing rain by then, and the wind had backed around and now roared down from the northeast. It was much colder. The mountain air came down through the passes, damp and brusque.

There was little of the town. Caleb Woodstock said the place was called Briny, but it was little more than a stop-over for those stages en route to Richmond. What homes there were seemed to be scattered in the distance, lost in the deep woods which hung upon the mountains all around. The Old Mill Tavern sat beside a stream some twenty feet wide. There was a wheel on one side of the inn which turned rapidly in the stream which was running fast with the rains. Blue smoke curled up into the heavy mist from the stone chimney.

"There's a fire at least," Hamilton said. "By gad, I'd like the feel of it on me. I'm soaked through."

"This rain eats into my very marrow," Du Maurier agreed. "But I am not so sure. Is it safe, this place? Should we stop? We get closer to Richmond as we ride."

Caleb Woodstock groaned. "Don't give a hoot myself whether we get to Richmond or not. Right now, I could eat a steer. This buckskin gets awful soggy on a man."

René Du Maurier frowned and rubbed his long nose as if sniffing the air for a sign of danger. "I do not know, *mes amis.*"

Hamilton sighed. "As for me, I don't care. The spirit is very willing, but the flesh, I regret to say, is weak. We've got to eat sometime, why not here?"

"A trap. We may be killed."

"By gad, it might be worth dying if I could sink my teeth into a steak. I'm hungry again. And I'm cold."

"Ah," Du Maurier groaned, "it is the appetite of man which in the end destroys him. *Très bien.* Let us stop. But watch your sword, John, and look to your guns, Caleb. This is a strange state, this Virginia. Have you thought upon it? The theatre of war moves in the east, and here in the west, there is open country where British may move by day while Americans move by night. It is an odd thing, this mingling of the enemies. You

would think that the peoples here would be openly hostile to one or the other. But they butter their bread."

"Ye can't blame 'em," Caleb said. "What's an inn-keeper to do? I know, fr' instance, old Jaffe, at the Powder Horn. Staunch a Colonial as ye'll find in Boston. But he can't be open. By the lord Harry, one day Arnold and his men may ride in. If they suspect Jaffe is a rebel, they'd burn him to the ground. Another day Colonel Morgan and his raiders arrive. Jaffe's got to be diplomatical-like. If they get on that Jaffe has fed Arnold, hell blown to glory, what a mess there'd be!"

"That's the way it is," Hamilton said. "But dissertation upon the freaks of war only adds to my appetite. We'll try this place."

"It has a deserted look at least," Du Maurier noticed.

"So has a mouse-trap," Hamilton replied, smiling grimly. "But like a mouse, I wish some cheese, and I have known mice to steal their cheese without losing their heads."

CHAPTER XVI

DINNER BEFORE WE DIE

THEY rode up to the inn. Hamilton and Du Maurier dismounted in the rain and found the earth a sticky bog. Caleb Woodstock, the water dripping down his coonskin hat into his face, stayed up. "I'll mosey these nags around the back and put 'em in the barn for a bag of oats. It'll put spirit in them again. Soon's I'm through, I'll join ye inside. Hand over the reins."

René Du Maurier scowled darkly. "Have a care of that leather carcass you own for a body, *monsieur*. I have become very fond of it."

Caleb laughed. "I figger to keep on livin', Count. Fix me up a nice meal. I'll be with you short."

Hamilton and Du Maurier watched Caleb and the horses trot off in the rain. The mists hid them before the rear of the tavern did, and presently the sound of their hoofbeats stopped altogether. Hamilton turned, his cloak wrapped up around him, and he went to the door of the tavern, a ponderous oaken portal, braced with iron hinges. He did not knock, but lifted the latch and thrust the door wide open.

Comte Du Maurier came up directly behind him, hardly visible behind John Hamilton's bulk. The peninsula on his face contorted and sniffed noisily.

Hamilton said, "You smell Englishmen?"

"I smell for a certainty," Du Maurier answered, "lamb."

They stepped inside and shut the door. The wind caught it and slammed it loudly. Instantly, they were in a different world and it pleased them.

Here, for a change, was a pleasant little place, a small tavern, fitted with rugged and homely furniture. To one side, a fireplace not very large, with a beautiful leaping fire on the hearth, and glowing coals beneath the crackling logs. The warmth was instantly felt and it had a cheerful touch. It thawed them out. The smell of spitted lamb hung in the air, sharp and delicious. René Du Maurier sighed. *"Alors,"* he murmured, "it is done as the Armenians do it, it has the scent of the Armenian, this lamb. Look. Balls of it on the spit above the fire. *Mon Dieu,* I shall die at the lusciousness!"

"Or on the cousin of that spit," said Hamilton. *"Regardez!"* He gestured with a flick of his eyes.

Du Maurier half-turned. He had commanded a view of most of the inn from the door but he had not looked into that corner which the door had hidden in opening. Now, with the door closed, he saw. There was a man stretched out in a lounging chair, his feet propped up on a maple bench before the left edge of the fireplace. He appeared to be warming the bottoms of his feet. He was dressed decently, a waistcoat and navy blue trousers with heavy stockings and black shoes brass buckled. He wore no arms.

"Asleep," Du Maurier said.

"Adoze," said Hamilton. He surveyed the fellow sharply. The man had a hard-bitten look which belied the innocence which a sleeping face acquires. A thin nose, gaunt mouth, and heavily lined forehead with a small white scar over the left eye. Hair black, rather unruly, hands big and calloused. No lace anywhere. A very plain man. There was no sound of snoring, just a shallow rising and falling of the depressed chest, the chap's chin resting on it.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," a voice said, startling them suddenly.

THE tavern-keeper had come out of a door behind the bar on the side of the room opposite the fireplace. He was an elderly little man with a shiny pate and a halo of gray hair and a face that was drearily pleased. He was professionally servile, and although Hamilton did not shake hands with the man, he knew the flesh would have been greasy to the touch. It was strange to see this image of an humble usurer against the display of virile mugs and bottles and glasses behind the enclosure which made the bar.

"Welcome to my tavern," said the inn-keeper. "I open its hospitality to you." He kept washing his hands and bowing, without once meeting their eyes.

The room was dank and musty, filled with the sour-pale odor of stale ale. It was, in its moldy untidiness, anything but comfortable.

Du Maurier pointed a steady finger at the man. "Enough of this humility," he said. "Your name?"

"My name is Jarret," replied the inn-keeper, slightly alarmed at the annoyance on the comte's face. "Forgive me, sirs, if I have delayed you. I heard the door slam and came at once. It is true I should have been here to welcome you, but I was engaged. Your horses? I will care for them at once."

"They are cared for," Du Maurier said.

"Ah," said the inn-keeper. "There is a third one then?"

"There is, *monsieur.*"

"You will want three rooms?"

"No rooms," Hamilton said. "We want only a good round meal, prepared with as much haste as is possible to keep the food decent."

"At once, at once, but surely the gentlemen will not go on to Richmond in this weather? This rain will chill you through and bring you down with your death of cold."

"What makes you think we are going to Richmond?" Hamilton asked in cold severity.

"I only thought—the rain—I assumed you were on the way. Forgive me, sirs—it was your comfort I was considering."

"Not so much as your pocketbook, old robber," Du Maurier said. "As a matter of fact, we are bound for Lace Falls and it is no more than a three or four hour journey from here, *non?*" He said it loudly for the benefit of any curious ears.

"True, true," said the inn-keeper. "You would not wish to stay the day in that case. And yet, the weather is so foul—"

"Food!" Hamilton snapped. "You prattle on like a mocking bird. Three square meals, mine host, and strap your tongue to your palate!"

The host, still bowing and scraping, ducked out, his face a trifle flushed at the rebuff. Hamilton and Du Maurier walked to the fire and shed their cloaks and hats. The rain water dripped off them fruitfully and hissed where the drops struck the heated grate. They draped their things over the backs of chairs to dry, and then sat down themselves, pushing their numbed feet close to the blaze and leaning back contentedly with a sigh.

PRESENTLY, Hamilton stirred. He was reluctant to even move the slightest bit for the fire soothed his body with a wonderful warm and invisible balm, but he fancied he heard a sound and he turned his head. Then he knew he had heard a sound. "Eh?" he said.

"Qu-est-ce que c'est?" René Du Maurier asked, without opening his eyes, his feet perched upon the grate.

"Our deep sleeper has vanished," said Hamilton.

"What?" Du Maurier's feet fell from the grate and he was upon his soles in an instant, his dark brows pulled down ferociously over his mild eyes. "Gone then? Hah!"

"Upstairs, most likely."

"*Non!* Gone to summon his minions more likely! To have the life of us!"

"René," said Hamilton, "the trouble with Gascons is very simple. They are proud to a point of heroism. They think in terms of a hundred. You speak of minions, you would like to say legions."

"You are pulling my leg, John."

"Exactly. The man is alone. That much I know. You could see the stables as well as I when we rode in. Almost empty. A horse or two. No coach. Where would the minions, the legions hide? Outdoors, in the woods, in the rain? Waiting rain-soaked on the chance we might come by?"

"You are right," Du Maurier said. "And yet, this suspect! He sleeps when we come. He sleeps through the slamming of that brute of a door. He sleeps until our backs are turned, our own eyes closed, and then—*pfft!* He is gone. It is unnatural. It smells." He rubbed his nose and sniffed truculently. "*Oui,* of a certainty, it smells!"

"It is the lamb."

"*Non,* it is an English spy!"

The tavern-keeper came back at that moment with knives and forks. Du Maurier saw him and cried, "Monsieur Jarret!" in a voice of thunder.

The poor man paled and came over, trembling openly. "Have I offended the gentlemen again? Forgive me, I am stupid."

"*Silence!*" commanded the comte. "I would have a word."

"Yes, my friend?"

"Your friend? Do you claim me for a friend, old jellyfish? Better your patron. You have an insulting way."

"I am only ignorant, I ask your indulgence—"

"Inn-keeper," Du Maurier said evenly, "there was a man here when we came in."

"Yes, my patron. There was a man."

"His name, *s'il vous plaît!*"

"I do not know, sir."

"His name!" Du Maurier roared, gripping his sword.

"I do not know, I do not know. He gave no name!"

"When did he arrive?"

"At dawn this morning," trembled the inn-keeper.

"Alone, *monsieur?*"

"No, my patron."

"Ah," Hamilton said, looking interested. "He did not arrive alone. And from which direction did he come? Explain yourself, mine host. Let your imagination play a bit but keep your tongue to the truth. A sword they say is not digestible no matter what the power of your belly. Speak."

THE inn-keeper's hands shook. He swallowed hard once and then said, "They came at dawn, sirs, a black coach driven by four horses. They came from Lace Falls, and the horses were tired. It was as though they had come a long way."

"Be more relaxed, more voluble," said Du Maurier. "How many?"

"Three men," said the inn-keeper. "The driver, two other men. With pistols. And the ladies."

Hamilton sat up in surprise. "The ladies?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, *monsieur,*" Du Maurier said excitedly, "these ladies. One of them, she was beautiful, her face like a carved mask, her hair of a golden hue which one sees only in a guinea, her skin pale white—"

"Yes, yes, that is she, the older of them."

"—her eyes green—"

"She without doubt, yes, she was here!"

"*Mon Dieu,* John, the same again! *She!* La Tournada!"

"Wait," Hamilton said. He turned to the inn-keeper. "And this other woman?"

"A girl more than a woman. She was pretty. She was, in her way, prettier than the older woman."

"Black ringlets."

"True!"

Hamilton, pale, stared at René Du Maurier. "You heard him? It is Anne Norwood!"

Du Maurier shrugged. "You think me surprised? No, John. The Comte de Chauville feels no surprise at all. *Pourquoi?* Because I have expected this thing."

Hamilton's face was like granite. "Expected what?"

"Will you step into my parlor, said the spider to the fly. Always you are the fly. This devil Caxton has the wits. He makes the little machinery move inside his skull. Himself, he has Miss Kathie to bring you closer to him. She plays the spider there. And La Tournada is given Miss Anne to bring you closer here. She too plays a spider."

"René," Hamilton whispered, "you think she knows this thing? You think that her soul, which for a moment had a touch of beauty a night ago, has grown ugly once again?"

Du Maurier shrugged. "She is not a stupid girl, John. It would be hard to trick her, *non?* And what does she on the pike to Richmond in the company of a British spy, whom she *knows* to want your life!" He swung around. *"Et vous, monsieur*—what did they do when they arrived?"

"Why," replied the bewildered innkeeper, "they arrived and they partook of breakfast and then the coach left as quickly as it had come. It went toward Richmond. But when it left, it did not take this extra man of whom we speak. He stayed behind."

"You did not hear—" Du Maurier began, but he was cut short by the cracking echo of a shot.

They were on their feet instantly. The inn-keeper went white and wrung his hands. Hamilton snapped, "The stables! It was a rifle! Cal's rifle! If that bobcat of an Englishman—"

"Allons!"

Without cloaks or hats, they ran toward the back of the inn, but they did not manage to reach the rear door and get outside to soak themselves again, for the rear door opened and Caleb Woodstock stumbled in, with a gash on his forehead and thunder in his sharp eyes.

"By the front door!" he growled. "Quick!"

Hamilton ran across the room and sprang to the front door. He raised the latch and swung it back just in time to see a horseman go galloping off toward Richmond through the mist and rain. He swung his hand down for his pistol but he had removed it along with his belt and cloak.

"Jumpin' moonstruck toads," Caleb Woodstock breathed. "He's got away clean."

Hamilton shut the door and came back. Caleb sat down in a chair by the fire while the inn-keeper ran for hot water to wash the wound.

"What happened?" Du Maurier chattered excitedly.

"He took me by surprise," Caleb grunted, screwing his face up as he felt his head. "Came from behind. I heard him and started to turn to have me a look and *bingo,* he hit me on the head. 'Fore I knew what the man was up to, *swoosh,* he had a horse—your'n, Count—and he started to make off with the nag. I fired the rifle and got up but he was on his way, so I ran into the back door to raise ye and—Well, I reckon he's gone."

Du Maurier sighed. "With *my* horse."

"To meet up with his cohorts," Hamilton said thoughtfully, "and wait for us at some distant rendezvous. And the joker is the mere fact that there is no other trail to Richmond from here but by Spear's Ridge. Oh, we can get you another horse, René. The thing is: do you want one?"

Du Maurier laughed. "It would be safer to have to stay behind, you mean? *Eh bien.* They will wait ahead for certain now, and we are in a *cul-de-sac.* Still, it is said that if you enter such a *sac* with enough rapidity, you sometimes burst through the other side of it unscratched. Ah well—"

"Your horse is tired," Caleb said.

"They's two others in the barn, fresh nags. We could catch 'im."

"And miss our dinner here?" Hamilton cried in horror. "I would prefer to let him escape."

"And I, *monsieur!*"

Caleb Woodstock leaned back and sighed. "All right, gents. If that's the way ye feel. As the philosopher says, eat drink and be merry, 'cause the chances of dyin' this afternoon are goin' to be better than good."

CHAPTER XVII

THE PONDEROUS PEACOCK

KATHIE FITZPATRICK, gagged by a white handkerchief, and securely bound to a chair near the window of a bedroom in the upper story of the Powder Horn, a large hostelry in the village of Spear's Ridge not more than ten miles from the outskirts of the city of Richmond, heard the rattle of a coach's iron tires upon the cobblestones of the yard beneath her and tried hard to see the coach itself.

At the moment, she was alone. The ropes around her calves and wrists were tight, they cut into her pale skin, and her back ached with fatigue from her position in the chair.

Nevertheless, the fact that it was a chair lent her a little mobility. By pressing down her toes she could obtain leverage to slide the chair around a bit. She was gagged so that she could not cry out, but they had not bandaged her eyes, and she could still see. She gradually inched herself closer to the window and by twisting her neck until it hurt, she looked out.

It was raining hard, long slashing strikes of rain which peppered the glass like huge overripe grapes. She saw the black coach downstairs. There should have been a portico to protect it from the rain, but there was none. She saw the driver and another man get down from the step. They opened the coach's door, and two women got out.

"It is she," Kathie thought, " 'tis the same beauty who was at the Whistling Oyster the first night!"

They all disappeared then, into the inn, and the driver went back to his perch and drove the horses around to the rear.

She settled back again and strained to loosen the ropes around her.

Kathie's state of mind was cluttered with confusion. She knew, so she thought, why she had been abducted. She had always held a fear of getting caught one day while eavesdropping. But it was the only sport an in-keeper's daughter might indulge in. Well, this once she had been caught, and she had overheard a thing which was more important than some drummer's indiscretion or some lady's review of a malady. She recalled the shots and cries at her departure, she wondered if either Marcel or Fitzie had been hurt, she had heard Major Caxton telling Titus Hamilton and Lord Cartwright that Sir Gerald Mackey had been killed by a cleaver as the coach stormed out of the Whistling Oyster's yard. Everything was confusion.

The motive of it all baffled her.

Presently, no more than ten or fifteen minutes later, the door opened. Kathie jerked her head around away from the window. Major Caxton, looking pleased, entered and waved a hand at her. Behind him was the lady—Edith Desmond.

"We have a little bait, you see," Major Caxton said, twisting his mouth in a smile. "I think this piece of cheese will draw the rat, eh? You have made excellent time yourself, Milady. One is apt to believe that, for once, you are earnest in this business of the packet's recovery. Did the young lady object?"

"Of course, she objected," Edith Desmond said coldly. "What would you expect, driving through a night of rain for no apparent reason. And I warn you, Major, Miss Norwood has a mind of her own. While it may have conformed with that of her grandfather while we were in Winchester, the fact remains that away from that place, her words are fiery and—well—contrary to our aims. She bears

watching. I think she would do anything to stop us if she knew our quarry was Hamilton."

"That is simple enough then," Caxton said, his voice breaking croakily as it often did. "Do not tell her."

"She can guess. She is no fool. There is guile behind her innocent beauty."

"And behind your *innocent* beauty, madame?"

Milady's eyes sparkled, as quick and bright and cold as the glittering little weapon that gave her her name. Her lips pursed in anger.

"Your sarcasm is wasted. Who is this girl?"

"Don't you recognize her?" Caxton smiled. "She waited on you one evening recently."

"She has a familiar look," Milady said. "What beasts you are to bind her that way. It must hurt. And why do you gag her?"

"Beasts we may be," Caxton replied evenly, "but yon wench has strength in her bones and a shout in her throat. I tell you, had I not needed her to net this Hamilton rogue, I'd have put a bullet in her head before this. She listens, she is a spy on her own, and her tongue is Irish and touched with the gift of blasphemy and insult."

"Good lord," said Milady drily, "how your pride sticks in your throat. But I do remember her now. The maid at the Whistling Oyster at Lace Falls."

"She heard our plans. She would have ridden out to warn the rogue of them." Major Caxton shrugged. "There was nothing else to do."

"I see. And what are the plans for me? What on earth am I to do with the Norwood girl?"

"Wait. Cartwright will tell you that. He'll be here shortly. Better yet, I'll go for him."

"Must I wait here?" Milady Desmond asked, shivering a little. "This girl bothers me. She keeps staring. I'll be downstairs at the fire. I'm chilled. This rain is cold."

Caxton sneered, "I would have thought that madame's hot blood could never cool. But nothing is permanent, eh? If you wish, downstairs."

They went out and closed the door.

THE fireplace was huge and the fire was glorious. Edith Desmond forgot everything for a few moments while she bathed herself in the luxury of warmth. She sat down before it, feeling mussed and untidy. Vaguely she yearned for Richmond and a bath and change of clothes. Her face, she knew, must have looked unwomanly. It was all very well for the King to demand that she risk her life in his service, but to risk her sleep, her beauty and her glamor was quite something else again.

In a few minutes, however, she stopped dreaming, along with the sight of Major Caxton returning down the stairs with Lord Cartwright in tow. There was a third man with them whom she had not seen before. He was big, he looked dull and somehow there was a ponderous weight in his steps, in his eyes, in his lumbering movements.

They drew up beside her. Lord Cartwright bowed, as did the portly man, but Caxton only grinned smugly. "Madame Desmond, permit me to introduce Mr. Hamilton—Mr. Titus Hamilton."

Titus Hamilton coughed behind his hand. "Milady," he murmured, nodding. "The pleasure is mine."

"How do you do," she said. Her mouth did not close completely as she watched him. "But you are—you're his brother!"

"Yes, madame," Titus said dully. "I admit the circumstance with reluctance. Won't you all be seated?"

Caxton had already sat down and was smiling at the fire. Titus placed himself stiffly in a chair. Lord Cartwright remained standing.

"May we talk safely?" Edith Desmond said.

Cartwright glanced around. Old Man Jaffe, who owned the place, was not in sight. There were no other guests. Cartwright nodded. But Caxton added, "Mind

your words and speak low. This is a Yankee inn, and we are close to Richmond. I need not remind you that where we could move with impunity in the valley, we cannot here. There are Colonial soldiers within shooting distance and we are once more relegated to the secrecy of spies. Instead of reconnaissance, it is once again espionage. Milord?"

Cartwright had indicated that he wished to speak. He took a seat beside Edith Desmond and he said severely, "I have heard disturbing things, Milady. Quite unlike you."

"From my dear dear friend," she said, smiling murderously at Caxton, who bowed mockingly.

"This private feud between you does not concern me," said Lord Cartwright. "I am concerned only with those orders of Washington. You had them and you lost them, Milady. I suppose every one may be allowed at least a single mistake. But it was unlike you to fail in the simple sort of mission of carrying papers. You have never done it before."

"I thank you, at least, for allowing me an error," Milady replied bitingly. "Major Caxton would have had me shot."

Cartwright shot a glance at Caxton who did not look disturbed. "The major takes too much upon him at times. There are those who issue orders, and those who obey them. Thus far, the major has lived to obey them."

"It was said in a moment of heat, Milord," Caxton said.

"Nevertheless, my dear," Cartwright went on, as he turned back to Edith Desmond, "you failed me. You have caused no end of delay and trouble and lost the lives, no doubt, of many men. I assume you are aware of the deceptions and traps which it became necessary to plan following the loss?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "What else could I do? I did not expect the lad to follow to Winchester. He took me by surprise. I could have stopped him by killing him, indeed, Major Caxton would have done just that. But you said he was not to be hurt." She glanced meaningly in the direction of Titus, who—slow-witted though he was—did not escape the significance of the look.

"I see," he said slowly. "He was given immunity because you did not want to offend me."

"Let's be frank," she said. "That's true. It was an awkward situation. You a loyalist, he a rebel."

"Gentlemen," Titus said in a slow deep voice, "permit me to set your minds at ease. John Hamilton is related to me by blood. But by nothing more! I believe in the King, in his right to rule, in America as a colony of Great Britain, and I believe that all traitors to the King should perish, even though one of them is a brother of mine. In other words, gentlemen," his voice grew ominous, "do not spare John Hamilton because of me."

His heavy face crimsoned as if he was pleased with the shocking finality of his words.

Edith Desmond gasped. "Do you know what you are saying? You give license for the murder of your own brother!"

"I am aware of that, madame," Titus replied, smiling coldly, "and I must say that I get a faint sensation of pleasure at the thought."

EDITH DESMOND stared at him, fascinated, as one watches the cold glitter in the eyes of a snake, a remote feeling of repugnance in her at his proximity. Here was a Virginia aristocrat, the head of a family line whose original land grant had come from the King of England himself. Yet there was something loathesome about his plump and vicious smugness.

"So," she said, smiling to cover the coldness around her heart, "you are a true subject."

"Thank you, madame."

He bowed slightly.

"So you see," Caxton said with a savage smile, "we will not have to baby young Hamilton as we have had to do in the past. And that is pleasurable to me too! I have a score to settle with the young swine and

it will end only with brandy for one. I plan to be the one, have no doubts."

"Of course," Milady said bitterly. "It is simple now. Shoot Hamilton on sight and get his papers. Preferably in the back with your bullet, Major. Your aim is always better there."

Major Caxton went white. He took a step forward.

"Wait," said Lord Cartwright. And as Caxton gained control of himself and stepped back, Cartwright went on, "As a matter of fact, we have no indication as yet that Hamilton is en route to Richmond. He has not been seen since the recent night"—he cleared his throat—"when he purloined the papers from milady."

"He has not passed by this route," Major Caxton snapped. "I questioned every inn-keeper along the way. And at the toll-bridge past the Gap, the toll-keeper told me he had seen no one resembling either John Hamilton or Du Maurier."

"Which puts them behind you on this route," said Cartwright. "But have you considered that the pair might reach Richmond via the White Trail across the mountains below at Luray?"

"But that is the long way! It would take them two days at least to cover those mountains!"

"Still, there might be no urgency in the orders. Remember, we believe them to tell of Washington's movements, not Lafayette's. The two days might not mean much."

Cartwright's pale fingers unclasped themselves to adjust the creamy lace of his cuffs. His face wore a look of utter complacency. He smiled.

Caxton looked honestly troubled. "But that would put them behind us still. Milord, what do you suggest?"

Milady leaned forward.

"I suggest," said Lord Cartwright soberly, "that milady move on to Richmond at once and set a watch upon the headquarters for either one of them. She will take her men, Smith and Demarest. If either of the two men be sighted, the papers are to be removed at once—by force."

"I have only Demarest," Edith Desmond said. "Smith remained at Old Mill. He was to wait until he saw them approach and then ride off ahead to warn you here of their coming so that you might be ready."

"A clever thought," said Cartwright. "In that case, you will find other help at my own headquarters. I will give you a letter. Captain Aintree is in charge there and I will instruct him to assist you. I must warn you all that deepest secrecy is essential from now on. We cannot move openly in the city, it is under American occupation. One false step and they'll stretch your necks from the nearest tree."

Edith Desmond looked disturbed. "But what of the girl, Milord, who came with me?"

Cartwright shrugged. "Who is she?"

"Didn't the major tell you?"

"He did not."

"She is Anne Norwood," Caxton said. "Young Hamilton was to have married her. I persuaded her grandfather to send her to an aunt in Richmond. More bait for the rogue."

The spy was inordinately pleased with himself at his wit.

Titus Hamilton looked frightened. "Anne Norwood? She mustn't see me among you."

"You know her?" Cartwright said. "Then she shall not be used, Titus."

"I did not ask you to ignore her," Titus said, his face clouding. "Caxton is quite right. She makes an admirable lure. No, do not spare the use of her, it is quite all right. Just so she does not see me to report to her grandfather that I was in any way responsible for any predicament she might fall into."

"Mr. Hamilton," put in Milady Desmond wrily, "eats his bread with butter on both sides."

Scorn danced in her eyes.

Titus stood up, stiffening. "Madame," he said pompously, "I find you are impudent!"

"Not at all," Edith Desmond replied,

"merely observant. How masterful a man you are, sir! How great a heart you have to let us play puppets with your dearest friends so that we may catch this terrible fellow, this blackguard whom God, in his ignorance, willed upon you as a brother. We might even arrange for you to rescue this young girl. She might think you a hero, zounds, you might even marry her yourself! I daresay the thought has not escaped you at some time or other."

TITUS' face went dark with fury. He said: "Lord Cartwright, I will wait in my room until Miss Norwood and this woman have departed for the city." He strode off angrily.

Major Caxton looked pleased. Lord Cartwright was on his feet, white with anger himself. "You go too far, Milady. You have a nasty tongue. You'll hear more of this at a better time, I warn you."

"He is a peacock," she snapped. "A ponderous peacock with the heart of a yellow lily. What was he doing here anyway?"

"It might interest you to know, my dear," Major Caxton said, smiling warmly at Cartwright's displeasure, "that yon peacock has one thousand armed men on the march right now, along with supplies for Lord Cornwallis and his men. They are on the way to Yorktown. True, Mr. Hamilton's extreme patriotism will benefit him with the seized and confiscated lands of all the rebels in his area—this from the King himself. But even so, one thousand men should not be so insulted. Milord Cornwallis has need of them, fortification or not! It is no picnic we face in Richmond. Lafayette is commanding the entire Virginia militia, over three thousand rifles, and he has been joined by Mad Anthony Wayne. Until we know of Washington's plans and the plans of his French allies, we have need of every man, every gun, every grain of corn. These are perilous times."

"I did not know!" Edith Desmond said quickly, but Cartwright would not be appeased now. His face was a thundercloud. "You've said enough. And now I order you to Richmond. You are to wait for me there at my headquarters and place a watch for Hamilton and the Frenchman. You are to take the Norwood girl with you, incarcerate her in the house until we are sure of our man and have no further use for her. She will then be liberated. At once!"

"Yes, Milord," said Edith Desmond humbly.

Major Caxton permitted himself a chuckle which was plainly audible, and then walked away.

But he was not so self-sufficient a few moments later when he opened the door of his room and found Miss Anne Norwood sitting in a chair and waiting for him. "Good day, Major," she said politely. "We meet again, I see. But I will say that you are more surprised than I."

"Damme, damme!" Major Caxton whispered hoarsely. "How in—"

"When you close a door, Major," she said, "you should close it all the way. Close it so that the wind does not tip it open and a passerby may look in and see inside."

Major Caxton looked thunderstruck. The chair she sat in was covered with rope. It was the same chair which Kathie Fitzpatrick had occupied.

"Yes," smiled Anne Norwood coldly, as she watched his growing eyes expand, "Yes, she is gone. Out that window. She did not mind the rain. She reached a horse, I saw that myself. And she rode west, toward Briny, to warn John Hamilton, no doubt. Is there anything else I may tell you?"

For answer, he strode over to her and savagely struck her face. The blow knocked her into a corner, the chair tipped over. She did not even cry out, but lay still where she had fallen. Then Major Caxton turned, his mouth working, and called out the door for Lord Cartwright.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Kathie slashed the man with her belt

The Rogue

By RICHARD SALE

CHAPTER XVIII

AT GALLOP

THE "Smith" whom Milady Edith Desmond had left behind at the Old Mill Tavern in Briny was really named Roger Smith and he lived in Winchester. He was not a soldier, nor was he a British agent. He had got into the business purely because Old Man Norwood had offered him ten pounds a week to police the grounds, along with another local lad named Stacey Demarest, who was at the Powder Horn (at that moment) with Lady Desmond and the others.

Smith was not a brave man and he counted on his job at the Norwood plantation as being one without risk. He knew that police of any sort were unnecessary there because the villagers would not let temper run so high as to attack the plantation; they had too much awe of the Norwood family and what the name had meant to Winchester. So it was with qualms that Old Man Norwood told him (and Stacey Demarest) that they were to ride Miss Norwood's coach to Richmond, that they were to keep a sharp eye for John Hamilton and shoot him on sight, and that they were to see that

This story, herein concluded, began in the Argosy for June 11

Edith Desmond reached Richmond and her superiors without trying to escape. Old Man Norwood said this, but the words had really come from Caxton.

This was all very well. But Roger Smith was a valley man and he had heard of the Rogue—Hamilton. The fellow from Lace Falls was not the sort of lout you shot on sight simply because he was such an excellent shot himself.

So all the way to Briny and Old Mill Tavern, Roger Smith had quaked in his boots and hoped that John Hamilton would not show his head any of the way. He had urged the driver not to stop for any rests until Lace Falls had been passed and he had informed Lady Desmond of this fact.

When they finally reached Old Mill Tavern in the pouring rain, Roger Smith felt a little better. The weather was vile, surely horsemen would not venture out into it. It was safe to think that John Hamilton had doubtless passed the night before at Lace Falls and that Hamilton would not ride today because of the storm.

So when, at the Old Mill, Milady Desmond offered him one hundred pounds if he would stay behind, watch for Hamilton, and then ride off quickly for Spear's Ridge to tell Caxton at the Powder Horn of Hamilton's approach, Roger Smith accepted.

It was a lot of money and it would be safe enough to earn. By keeping a watch at the window of the Old Mill tavern, he could see the ridge, a half a mile away, and note a horseman coming over it.

Thus the coach with Anne Norwood, Milady Desmond, Stacey Demarest, and the driver, left, and Roger Smith stayed behind. One hundred pounds to bring news of the approach of Hamilton, and what a comfortable place to await that approach, a fire burning, good brandy, and no more tossing atop that ghastly coach.

But Roger Smith had underestimated his man.

He did not keep a watch. He did not think Hamilton would ride in such weather. And when, past noon, the door of the tavern swung open and Du Maurier and Hamilton strode in, Smith all but died of fright. He pretended sleep until their backs were turned and then he hastily left. He left so quickly, he did not collect his hat and cloak, nor his powder, all he left behind was a blow upon Caleb Woodstock's skull, delivered in a moment of panic which made him brave, and then he was gone like the wind with the news.

Three hours later, Roger Smith knew he was earning that money very dearly. Terrified of pursuit, he had ridden René Du Maurier's tired horse hard and dangerously. His good luck had held until he was within three miles of Spear's Ridge and the Powder Horn Inn. There, clattering across the slimy planks of a shaky little bridge, the horse slipped and fell, and Roger Smith was flung headlong from the saddle.

He landed in a blackberry bush and was badly scratched, but when he scrambled to his feet, he was thankful at least that he had not been seriously hurt. Du Maurier's horse had. It was, in fact, done for good. The broken foreleg was very plainly there, and the sounds of the beast compelled Roger Smith to place one of his pistols against its head and fire a ball into its skull.

When he had done so, the crack of the gun made him think. He had wasted a good ball. The pistol now was useless. He had nothing to prime in its gullet for another shot. His powder had been left behind him.

Nevertheless, he still had the other loaded pistol. He stuck it under his coat where it would stay comparatively dry, and he set out on foot for Spear's Ridge, half-walking, half-running. In this manner, half-frozen by the frigid rain and biting wind, he covered three miles. He was almost in sight of the Powder Horn Inn and thanking his stars that Hamilton and Du Maurier had not showed themselves in his rear. His breath came hard, he panted like a dog, and he was exhausted and cold. His footsteps faltered with his fatigue and his shoes, icy and

sodden and caked with red mud, scraped along the way while he kept looking behind him, his eyes wide in the terror of what he expected to see.

It was at this moment that he saw Kathie Fitzpatrick riding a stolen horse, hove into his sight, coming from east with her raven-black hair flying out in the rush of wind behind her as though she were one of the Furies, released for action.

THERE was a shot. The rain muffled it. The cry of the falling wind carried it away toward the dark-green pine studded gap which rose before them, the smoky mists hid the more bitter smoke of gunpowder. The detonation was far enough off, what with the weather, to have lost its sharp and penetrating crack. Rather it sounded like distant cannon-fire, a boom of sound. But they recognized it instantly, and their horses felt the pressure of the bit at the mouth as they reined in.

"Did you hear that?" Hamilton asked, his eyes keen.

"Pistol," said Caleb Woodstock laconically from the parcel of bones which was the horse he rode.

"It sounded big, it sounded heavy," Comte René Du Maurier said in awe. "Almost like cannon."

"The wind and rain," Caleb said. "That was a pistol, I'm tellin' ye, gents, no more'n' a half a league ahead. Wasn't fired at us. It's on ahead some."

Hamilton knew that. There had been no song of a ball buzzing past them or near them. It was not an ambuscade. But what was it then?

"You do not think it is the frog of a Caxton?" Du Maurier asked, scowling. "*Mon Dieu,* but he may be practising his guns. The informer of the tavern must have reached him by now! They know we come."

"They do not," Hamilton said. "We didn't waste any time in Briny. That man, whoever he was, had only half an hour start. You saw where the horse fell and was shot back by the bridge. René, you old cabbage, I tell you we're in luck! We've caught up with the scut, he's had to walk on foot from there. Let's ride!"

They kicked their mounts and galloped through the gap along the pike in the direction of the sound of the shot. And when they had passed through the cut and reached the mouth of the east side of the pass, they burst down upon a scene which shocked them.

Roger Smith did not see nor hear them come. He was concerned first with getting the horse so that he could ride to the Powder Horn, and second with bringing Kathie Fitzpatrick back there with him and doubtless receiving a bonus for the good work.

Kathie had given herself away, for when he sprang out in front of her and raised his pistol for her to stop, she took him for a helpful Colonial and blurted a quick story of British agents at the inn laying a trap, and asked his help. Whereupon, he had grabbed her bridle and tried to pull her down.

But Kathie had courage. When she saw his intention, she whipped him severely across the face with her dress belt which she had been using on the horse's flank.

Smith fired at her. His aim was wild, the lunging horse frightened him, and for another moment, they struggled, his hands clawing at Kathie's dress, as he tried to jerk her from the saddle, Kathie slashing him with the strap.

Next instant, there was a second shot. Roger Smith pitched forward onto his face in the mud with a ball through his heart. And so the hundred pounds Milady Desmond had promised him would remain uncollected for eternity. But it is doubtful if she would have paid it anyhow.

HAMILTON was beside the other horse in a split second and he did not arrive any too soon. Kathie was not of the stock which wilts and then faints, but the ordeal had tried her badly, and she slumped in the saddle and buried her face in her hands, crying. Comte Du Maurier, with a gentleman's tact, led

Caleb away, and they pretended to be looking for hostile agents eastward down the pike. Left more or less alone, Hamilton lifted Kathie's face and smiled at her. "You're all right, my pretty," he said. "And I'm the man to say so."

"Oh, John," she said, quickly under control again, "it's good to see you alive and well. There's many wouldn't have it so! You have not been hurt?"

"Not I," Hamilton said. "You mustn't cry anymore."

"It's the rain," she said huskily. "It's just the rain upon my face."

"So it is. Stupid of me." He hugged her impetuously. "Ah, Kate, you're a precious package. You got away from them and you were riding west to warn me. You don't have to deny me that, I know it's true. All this, for a wretch and a rogue. I should love you for it!"

She smiled bravely. "There's nothing I would not do for the love of you, John," she said. "You know that."

Hamilton nodded, and his face darkened. "Aye," he said. "I know it only too well. But it's wrong. No man is worth a woman's tears, and even an emperor would not be worth the risking of your life. Kate, I'm all confused. I've much to say to you and such little time to say it in. All this, all this—you could have avoided it by being prudent."

She looked alarmed. "Then you stopped at the inn?"

"Yes. Last night."

"Was father hurt? And Marcel? I heard the shots when they took me away—father fell—"

Hamilton's face stiffened. "Kate, I'd sooner cut my tongue in half than tell you this, but some one has got to say it. The news from the Whistling Oyster is all bad—"

He stopped as she put her hand to her mouth, stifled a gasp.

"Marcel is all right, he was only slightly wounded. He killed that fop who had an eye on you."

"Sir Gerald Mackey. That's why he didn't come with us. But father?"

"Kate, he's badly wounded."

"No."

"He's not much chance to live, it's in the balance."

She raised her head. "No, John, it isn't necessary. A lie is a lie, white or black—Father is dead. I can see it in your eyes."

He nodded silently.

Her mouth quivered. "I—I hoped—but somehow I felt—" She sighed.

Hamilton said, wincing: "This whole thing is my fault. It happened because of me."

She stared at him suddenly. "Nothing must happen to you, John. They plan to murder you, your own brother Titus is with them! They are at the Powder Horn, a bare mile or two from here, armed to the teeth and savage. They're desperate. You carry plans they covet. They'll stop at nothing, it is their last chance before Richmond. And a little while ago, I heard them say that La Tournada had arrived. And she has. I know!"

"What?" Hamilton exclaimed. "How do you know? Did you know also that Anne Norwood is with her? Anne Norwood with a British agent? By gad. I described her soul to you once, didn't I, Kate? And then, for a moment, I thought that I was wrong." He set his jaw. "But it seems that I am right. Her soul is cold as the winter ice—"

Kathie held her hand to his mouth to stop him, "And yet, John, with all this ugly soul, you love her?"

Hamilton looked ashamed. "Kate, you humiliate me. It's true enough. I love her with her ugly soul. It's something in a man he can't change. I'd love her if she put the hand of death upon my heart. By gad, I wish it weren't so. I wish that you and I—"

"NO." KATHIE shook her head. "No, it is right. For her soul isn't ugly, John. She is brave, she is fine. She would give her life for you."

"Words," Hamilton said sharply. "Don't bait me, Kate."

"Actions," she replied. "'Tis truth, you banshee. How in the name of glory do you think I made my escape from the paws of that toad Caxton whose throat sticks on his own words?"

"Not Anne?" Hamilton's reared back in amazement.

"She untied me, unbound me, guarded the door while I escaped—she did all that and then stayed behind to face Major Caxton's wrath. She did that for you, John. It was all she could do for you. I could have done no more, loving you as she does."

Hamilton's face was pale. "What will they do to her?"

"I don't know."

"René!" Hamilton called. The Frenchman rode up quickly, Caleb following in his wake. "You heard?"

René Du Maurier sniffed and wiped a huge raindrop from the end of his huge nose where it had hung precariously for a few seconds. "As a gentleman, I have heard nothing, *monsieur,* but in order to save time, it is not necessary to repeat the conversation."

"Now damn," Caleb said drily, "if that ain't a Frenchman for ye. Says one thing and means another."

"René, we'll storm the place! There's no telling what they'll do to her for this!"

"John, *c'est impossible.*"

"We must. If you are afraid, I'll go alone."

Du Maurier looked pained. "Does love make one insult his closest friend? You speak like a fool, John. Does a Gascon know fear? *Non, non!* But wisdom? Ah! A Gascon does not fight to be killed. He fights to die. This would be foolish. They are armed—you heard Miss Kathie—we carry what they want, the papers"—

"Ye can't stop now, John," Caleb said, frowning. "Ye just can't do it."

"They're right," Kathie said quietly. "You know they are, John. And *she* will know it too."

"She'll take me for a fleeing coward," Hamilton said bitterly.

"No," Kathie replied. "She'll take you for a patriot. If I were there, as I might have been at this moment, and I could see you coming along the pike, I'd wave you on, on to Richmond, and thank God for the chance of making Richmond alive, and be grateful that our lives would mean so little against the issue of something so much greater."

"The Norwoods do not set much store upon the American brand of patriotism," Hamilton said, weakening.

"Ah, you are a fool," Kathie said. "She released me. Don't you understand that? She released me to warn you to keep away from the Powder Horn—to go by way of Luray to Richmond and save your life and complete your mission."

"East," Hamilton snapped. "At gallop. Smith did not get there ahead of us. The element of surprise is with us. Do not stop at the inn. Gallop hard, get past it, keep them in the rear should they follow. Richmond is not far away and it's American. Stay close to my flank, Kate, and ride like the devil himself."

"I am afraid," she said. "Kiss me once, John."

He reached over and embraced her with ardor, then smiled at her once, patted her cheek, withdrew his pistol from his belt, and waved to Du Maurier and Caleb.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. LAFAYETTE

MAJOR ROLPH CAXTON'S mind worked with speed and facility. Consider the situation. You are standing before an inn, bidding severe and caustic goodby to Milady Edith Desmond and Miss Anne Norwood and Mr. Titus Hamilton. These three are sitting within the coach and they are leaving, hurriedly, for Richmond. Milady Desmond is pale, Titus Hamilton is flushed, and Anne Norwood's cheek still shows the welt of red where she had been struck.

It was in such a position that Rolph Caxton found himself when he glanced west and saw the horsemen thundering down the pike.

There had been frantic moments within that upper room since Kathie Fitzpatrick had escaped by the window. Lord Cartwright, his face quickly old and somber at the bad word, came quickly. "You should not have struck her, Major," he said, not believing it.

"And why not?" Caxton snarled. "Why shouldn't I run her through, shoot her on the spot, hamstring her if I wish! Damn the little filly! All this work, all these good plans, and she throws them away in a gesture. I tell you, Milord, she's dangerous, damned dangerous. She looks innocent, she is pretty and young, but she can free a soul and she can warn a man and she can shoot a gun! I'll not feel safe with her behind my back, I tell you that!"

Cartwright was confused. He wrung his hands and did not know what to do. The mantle of command fell from his shoulders in that moment, and Major Caxton snapped, "I'll tell you what to do. She goes to Richmond at once. La Tournada takes her. And send that pot of a Titus along with them. I trust neither one of them but I can trust his pompous soul at least. He has too much at stake to lose now. He'll watch them sharp. Tell him to kill either one of them at a false move. Milady has lost her convictions in this last week, I don't trust her. They are to go to your headquarters in Richmond and wait for us there."

"Is this wise?"

"Milord," growled Major Caxton, "I warn you to mind what you do now. You're my superior in the field here, but there is another superior in New York, Colonel Lonsdale, and I shall report to him any and all suspicion of treason which I find. You are not immune. Act quickly, roughly. This is no time for soft hands! They go, and they wait there for us. I'm not done yet. That girl is my trump—I know for a fact that Hamilton loves her. I've got to hold her. She's the last stick I can shake at young Hamilton's crazy head! I'll have this done, sir, superior or not!"

"Yes, yes," said Lord Cartwright, bogged in emotional turmoil. "Anything you say, Major, if you think it right! But there is Hardflint Norwood to be reckoned with—"

"Only if we succeed, and he'll be amenable enough then, I daresay. Quick now! Set them going!"

The coach stood in the dripping wet, the driver was in his place. Milady Desmond was worried. She saw the welt on Anne Norwood's face, she knew why it was there. But she could not repress a feeling of relief that the other girl had escaped to warn John Hamilton. Titus Hamilton had been told of the treachery and he was torn between his hatred of his brother and love of the wealth which victory would bring him as compared with his duty to the Norwood family. "How simply," he thought bitterly, "the Rogue's demise would solve all this!"

"I depend upon you, sir, to see them there safely," Major Caxton snapped at him. "Milord, and I will wait here a bit and then follow. If you think—"

He stopped. There was a faraway sound of horses thudding down the road. Major Caxton gasped and looked west. He saw them then. Four of them. Hamilton in the lead with the black-haired Kathie on his flank, the wind stretching her hair and dress out behind her so that she looked like a demoniac witch. And then came the pygmy with the sword of a giant and the nose of a monster, René Du Maurier. And still another behind him, a rough and leathery man in sodden buckskin and a drenched coonskin cap, the tail of which shot out from behind his head as though a blast of ice had frozen it there stiff as stone, Caleb Woodstock.

Lord Cartwright, flabbergasted, stood there dumbly, his mouth agape, his hands at his sides.

But Major Caxton moved like a flash. He cracked the rump of the nearest coach horse and shouted to the driver: "Drive out and bar the road! Set the coach across the highway so that they'll have to turn in here! Ride!"

The startled driver laid the whip to the rearing horses and the coach rattled out across the highway.

Major Caxton turned toward the inn. He bellowed loudly for his men. There was Demarest, who had come with Milady Desmond, and three other fellows whom he had kept with him. There was no time for them to mount horse and engage the Americans. They ran out afoot, some with drawn pistols, some with upraised sabres.

JOHN HAMILTON had not expected such concerted action and it took him aback. He saw the black coach as it shot out onto the highway. It blocked the road. To get around it one would have to pass to the right and ride into the nest of guns and swords which waited there with Caxton and his men. Or he could jump. If he swung to the left around the head of the coach team, there was a fallen timber piece that he would have to clear. It was a five foot jump, and Bony had never jumped before. And there were the others behind him.

"We are trapped!" Du Maurier cried, and he too saw the jump. "Can you make that one, my friend?"

"Yes, yes!" Hamilton shouted. "It's our only chance! Jump it! Stay with me, Kathie!"

Du Maurier rode hard and came up close to Kathie. He reached out and pressed a packet into her hand. "Keep these!" he cried sharply. "Return them if you see me again! Otherwise give them to John! Good luck, good luck, *adieu!*"

Hamilton turned at the sound of Du Maurier's voice. He saw that Caleb had the rifle free for firing. Du Maurier's sword had come out of its scabbard and flashed in the rain, a pistol up in his other hand. In horror, Hamilton saw the two of them change their course and ride straight for Caxton and his men.

"Allez-vous-en!" Du Maurier yelled. "We keep them here! We engage them so they will not follow! Go on, my dearest friend!"

Shots broke out. A ball whistled by Hamilton's head like an angry bee and he instinctively ducked low in the saddle. He could hear Kathie's horse snorting right behind him. The coach loomed up. He could see Major Caxton fire again at him, and then Du Maurier and Caleb answered with their guns and hell broke loose. Two men dropped, wounded, by the inn front, and then the guns were gone and swords were ringing against each other.

A pistol appeared from the interior of the coach and for a second John Hamilton felt the touch of death upon his head. It was as though he stared right down the black barrel of that pistol and watched the ball come out, and up above the barrel, he could see the face of his own brother, Titus Hamilton, contorted with fury.

Before the shot was fired, a hand reached out and pushed the gun aside. It jerked, went off with a crack, billowed smoke. The ball struck up the mud beneath the hooves of faithful Bony who started by.

Titus pushed the hand away. A white pale hand. A woman's. And then he roared: "John! She's here! She is here! I warn you to stop or I'll put a bullet in her brain!"

Hamilton reined Bony and pulled her in. But before he could stop, Anne Norwood, fighting furiously in Titus' brazen grasp, thrust her head out the window and screamed, "Ride, John! Ride!"

"Anne!" Hamilton roared.

"Ride, you dandy!" she cried. "Don't let them stop you now!"

Hamilton felt a slap on his shoulder and turned to see Kathie waving him on grimly. He kicked poor Bony's ribs and they put their heads down. Up over the timber Bony went and made it cleanly, amidst a roar of rage from the coach. Hamilton turned but Kathie had made the jump too, and the two of them went east for their lives, riding those horses as they had never been ridden before.

Of the original five horsemen who had

departed from Winchester that bright and yellow morning, only one remained.

And his heart was heavy with regret at their fates.

YES, there was still a war going on. John Hamilton saw that when he rode into Richmond, for here was a sure sign of the theatre of war—soldiers. They were American soldiers and they did not seem to show any of the gloom which had steeped itself about the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

There were the soldiers of the Virginia Militia in their cocked hats and blue coats, bandoliers around their chests and serviceable rifles in their hands. There were the backwoodsmen of Morgan in dashing white buckskin. And there were the proud and dignified soldiers of France, many of them, all about.

Hamilton and Kathie arrived in Richmond at dusk. It was an early dusk, but the rain stopped and the sun, dying at the close of day, broke through and painted the sky a brash lavender, broken by the low-hanging storm clouds still hovering over the mountains in the west.

Richmond lay serene enough, its red brick and white columns clean and crisp in the evening, washed thoroughly by the driving rain of the entire day. There was a scent of honeysuckle in the air, the pale purple wisteria fronted many homes, and the dogwood hung over the streets luxuriously.

Hamilton had no idea where military headquarters was, but it proved simple enough to locate. He met a cavalryman on horseback, told the fellow, a dour sort of man, that he had important news for General Lafayette, and the cavalryman wasted no time in leading Hamilton and Kathie to the nerve center of the Virginian armies.

It seemed strange to be there in actuality. Kathie looked frightful, her hair in wet strings, her dress ruined; she looked like a drowned kitten. As for Hamilton, the fact that he was a man spared him somewhat for men could look rough and go unnoticed. But he was unshaven and covered with the red mud which had been flung up from the highway on the long ride. They stood in a small and silent room and waited. A soldier remained at the door, holding a rifle at rest. There was lamplight, pale and yellow, and a desk to one side, and the loud, distinct ticking of a clock.

They waited, somewhat breathlessly.

Presently a man entered. He came in quietly and smiled at them, beckoned them to chairs, and then himself sat down behind the desk. There was no pomp about the entrance at all, not even an announcement to lend it importance. He was dressed handsomely and he wore a white wig. He was not very big, his shoulders were average, his face seemed slightly crooked and off center, his nose was rather long and a shade hawklike. Not a handsome man, but his cool eyes were steady and his aspect pleasant. Hamilton bowed slightly. *"Monsieur le Marquis?"*

"No," was the firm reply. "In France, perhaps, a marquis. In America, no more a titled man than you. My name is Lafayette. My rank is that of general. And you, sir?"

"John Hamilton, Lace Falls," Hamilton said quickly. "And this is Katherine Fitzpatrick of the same town."

Lafayette rose and clicked his heels neatly. *"Mademoiselle,* the pleasure is mine."

But Kathie only smiled tremulously. She could not speak.

"GENERAL LAFAYETTE," Hamilton said, "I can't possibly explain how this has all come about. The fact remains that I have important papers on my person for you. I have been told they come from General Washington near New York."

"But you are not a messenger, *monsieur!*"

"True enough. The messenger I received them from was Captain Callan. He is dead now. I'm glad to be able to

give you these, sir." And Hamilton unearthed the packet of papers from his coat and handed them over.

General Lafayette took them. "This amazes me," he said in wonder. "*Monsieur,* I have not the words to thank you. I have been waiting for this message, I have been anxious for it. You are right, Captain Callan was to bring the packet to me. He and another messenger, a dear friend of mine, Comte Du Maurier"—

"René!" Hamilton cried. "But he and I have come through Virginia together. He was carrying the duplicates"—

"Not killed?" Lafayette asked, concerned.

"I last saw him fighting. It was at the Powder Horn in Spear's Ridge. British agents trapped us there—Miss Fitzpatrick and I managed to escape while René held the others off with his sword"—

"But his papers are here," Kathie said suddenly. It was the first word she had spoken. She produced them from her dress and passed them to the general. "He was afraid he might not make it to Richmond. He passed them to me while we rode, just before the fight."

"Kathie!" Hamilton exclaimed. "I didn't know this."

"*Mademoiselle,* you have rendered a great service to your country. You will know how much it has meant in but a month or more. I presume you both have accomplished all this without the slightest idea of what word you carried. I can tell you, generally. It is the least you should know— The war sees its end."

Hamilton breathed, "The end?"

"The end. Wait. You shall see. Marsden!"

A soldier stepped forward from the door. "These papers go to Major Trent. Have him decode them at once and bring me the papers as soon as he is finished."

Hamilton cried: "You are not sending those papers out again with that one man alone"—

"Major Trent is in the house," Lafayette smiled. "You may go Marsden, and hurry. And now, Mr. Hamilton, Miss Fitzpatrick, you would like a change of clothes, a chance to wash, to—ah—primp?" He smiled pleasantly at Kathie.

"Thank you," Hamilton said. "But it must be in all haste, General. Miss Kathie may remain here, I would be grateful if you watched for her until I returned. But I have friends in danger. I must go back to them. A few soldiers perhaps, some help—"

"Of course. I'll have an orderly show you rooms meanwhile."

IN FIFTEEN minutes, John Hamilton was down again. He looked like a new man. General Lafayette was waiting for him at the desk. "Thank you for your hospitality," Hamilton said tersely. "But I must be off again, General."

"You have not stayed long enough to enjoy my hospitality," Lafayette replied. "But I understand how you feel, *monsieur.* But before you go, surely you would like to have me amplify my statement of a few moments ago, concerning the war's end?"

Hamilton stared. "The papers have been decoded?"

"Yes, *monsieur.*"

"Good news, General?"

Lafayette smiled. "We may consider," he said quietly, "that our cause is won. General Washington is on the march. I cannot tell you when or how or his numbers or plans. I can tell you this. There is an alliance. Five thousand French soldiers wait to join him, to join us. The French fleet will stand by in the Chesapeake for concerted action. General Howe is stuck in New York. The British fleet can do nothing to reinforce or relieve Lord Cornwallis. I have a rendezvous with General Washington, Monsieur Hamilton, and when we keep that rendezvous, the operation of a siege against Yorktown will begin. Cornwallis' fortifications will avail him little. He will surrender. I promise you that."

"By gad!" Hamilton exclaimed. "A free country!"

"Better to remember," Lafayette said

solemnly, "a country is free because its people want to be free. It is free because it will fight to preserve and protect that freedom. Let the Americans to come remember our lesson here, it has been a bitter, bloody one. . . . I will not forget you, Hamilton. I keep a little book for a friend of mine, for General Washington. There have been many such as you who risked their lives for this cause without hope of glory, of rank in the army, of remuneration. General Washington keeps a record of such folk in the hope that someday he may repay a man like you."

"Repay me? Repay me *what?*" Hamilton smiled grimly. "Can he repay anyone more than by giving them a birthright? Thank you, *Monsieur le Marquis,* you make me proud to be an American."

But at that moment, Private Marsden, the guard of the door, entered the room, clicked his heels as he came to attention, and then he announced, "General Lafayette, sir!"

"Private?"

"Friends, sir. Asking for Mr. Hamilton."

"Send them in."

Hamilton turned. The door opened. A man in buckskin sauntered in. His head was wrapped in a red mud bandage and his coonskin cap was gone. There was a saber cut across his cheek and he was covered from head to foot with caked dirt. But he was alive, and the eyes of Caleb Woodstock peaked out from behind the mud mask.

And Hamilton had no sooner felt the joy of reunion with his woodsman friend when he saw another man behind Caleb, a little insignificant lout with large ears and shy eyes.

"By gad," Hamilton said. "It is Ferdinand!"

CHAPTER XX

GASCONS DON'T DIE

IT WAS Ferdinand all right—the knave, the churl, the corpse. Ferdinand was alive and well. Indeed, he was even clean. He appeared to be enjoying particular good health. There was nothing in his demeanor or aspect to indicate that he had risen from the dead.

"Cal! Ferdinand!"

"Look," said Caleb Woodstock drily, "what I found for ye. Is this Mister Lafayette? How're ye do, suh? John, it's a long story, and matter of fact, I oughtn't be here to tell it, but I am."

"Your head," Hamilton said. "Sit down. Do you feel"—

"Fitter'n a bull mink in the matin' season," Caleb replied. "But, beggin' the general's pardon, I got more important things to say to ye, John. I'm all right. It was a rough fight, but I got away without gettin' myself killed. I on'y rode off when I saw the count fall"—

Hamilton gasped as if in pain. "Du Maurier? Dead then!"

"That's what I thought," Caleb said. "But Ferdinand says it ain't so. When I rode off, I had to go toward Briny 'cause they still had the road blocked with that coach. I hung in the woods and they finally all left and came here. I followed 'em—at a mighty safe distance to the rear, I don't mind sayin'—but I lost 'em when we reached Richmond. I'd a mind to raise some sojers here and capture 'em, but they got out'n my sight. And lo and behold, when I get to this place after askin' a million questions on how to find it, I find Ferdinand sittin' on the curbin' outside, pickin' his teeth and splashin' one foot in a puddle!"

"Ferdinand," Hamilton said, "how do you know your master is all right? What in heaven are you doing here?"

Ferdinand sighed. "Oh, how I have been lonely, *monsieur.*"

Hamilton groaned. "He speaks of loneliness at a time like this. General Lafayette, your French is better than mine. This man is a countryman of yours. Would you"—

"Mais oui," Lafayette said. "Permit me."

There ensued a hot and stern exchange of French between the marquis and Ferdinand, and the words went so quickly that even John Hamilton could not follow

all of them. It went on for two full minutes, and somehow Lafayette's own animation spurred the docile and mentally torpid Ferdinand to expedient replies.

"*Ma foi,*" said General Lafayette at last. "This man is a pygmy among giants. Never have I seen such mentality. He is a child in arms. But his very childishness —listen to this, Monsieur Hamilton. René du Maurier is alive without doubt. Alive and well."

"Where?"

"Here—in Richmond."

"You have the address?"

"But yes. Connaught House, 22 Spruce Street."

"But I don't understand. How can we know this?"

Lafayette sighed. "That is a long story which will take Monsieur Ferdinand many a year to tell. I gather that he was lost in a encounter en route here and separated from you. But he kept on, and did not stop all the way. He undoubtedly reached Richmond before you did. He slept in the woods one night, and the next night did not sleep at all. He has been waiting at the outskirts of Richmond for a sign of you. He says he saw you and Mademoiselle Katherine come through but you went by so quickly, he could not call. Then came a coach later, and he saw his master within it, bound and gagged securely. He mounted his horse and followed the coach to this address. Then he came here where *monsieur l'americain* discovered him."

Hamilton grabbed Ferdinand. "How many were there? Who was with Du Maurier?"

Ferdinand thought a bit and then said slowly, "There were two ladies, and two men also. One of the ladies was she, the one of dread—La Tournada."

"And the man?"

"Major Caxton, you mean? Oh, yes. Of a certainty."

Hamilton turned quickly to Lafayette. "General, I will not need your soldiers. You may surround the house if you have a mind, but do not enter it. One I hold dear is within, and the sight of soldiers might cost her life. Major Caxton still holds that whip to my back. I ask you to permit me and these men to make a try first, and if we fail, you will be free to act."

"You think this wise?" Lafayette asked. "These agents are precious to me. I want them badly. They have eluded my counter-espionage for a long time."

"I promise you them."

"I cannot refuse you, *monsieur,* after your gift to me."

"Thank you, General. You heard, Cal? Outside! Wait for me! And you, Ferdinand! Ah, my frog of Brattle Hill, the moment is here at last!" Hamilton gritted his teeth. "This time I have no pressing business, and we will settle an argument with steel."

KATHIE did not hear the knock on her door. Hamilton did not bother to knock a second time, he was in too much of a hurry. He opened the door and went in. He found Kathie prone on the bed, face down. There was little sound from her, for sobs are not loud like wails, but her face was buried in a pillow which was plainly tear-stained, and her small shoulders shook convulsively.

Hamilton looked pained. He walked quietly to the bed and sat down beside her. "Kate," he said softly. He touched her shoulder. "Don't, Kate."

Kathie did not show her face. "I can't help it, John. 'Tis nothing really."

Hamilton said nothing. He did not know what to say. Like most men, the crying of a woman had left him speechless.

"I—'tis only," Kathie faltered, "that everything is done. You are safe, and the papers have arrived. I did not feel the brittle soul in me any longer. I have begun to feel again, that is all."

"Kate, Kate," said Hamilton sadly, "each tear is a dagger in my heart. I know how you feel, I know it too well. Fitzie is dead because of me—"

"Ah, no, John."

"But it was my fault. They would not have touched you otherwise, had you not been listening for my sake."

"Father would not have liked to hear that," she whispered. "He was not a brave man, John, but he would have done it again today, the same way, knowing the same consequences." She sat up a little and dried her eyes.

"Kate, what will you do now? Will you return to the inn?"

She shook her head. "No, I'll sell the inn. There's nothing for me back there, except loneliness."

"But where would you go?"

"I have an uncle in Philadelphia," Kathie said, barely audible. "And a cousin."

"A cousin?" Hamilton said.

"Who wishes to marry me."

Hamilton turned her face around toward him and looked at her eyes steadily. "Kate," he said earnestly, "will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

Kathie stared. Her eyes flicked to and fro across his face, and a faint sad smile touched her quivering mouth. "You would marry me? You pity me that much? Or is it remorse, John? Ah, if it were only love"—

"I'm very fond of you."

"Don't." She touched his mouth. "No, John. I must refuse your offer. Please go."

"Kate!"

"I'm not angry. I thank you, John. But we are friends, we are good enough friends to have the truth between us. I know how much you love Anne Norwood. Don't deny yourself happiness because you are sorry for a girl who loved you enough to try and protect you. I would have done that had you hated me. I would do it now, knowing we can never be together. I would do it in the future when you are her husband. Fate is a strange thing, John, but we can't change it. 'Tis written in heaven what should be. The star for you and me has never risen. But before you go, kiss me once."

He kissed her gently; she was limp in his arms. "God bless you, child," he said huskily.

"And keep you, John," she said. "Goodbye."

Hamilton went out without another word.

CHAPTER XXI

BRANDY FOR ONE

IT WAS close to midnight, and the streets of Richmond lay dark and still beneath the sliver of a moon which rose in the sky as nimbus clouds vanished in the west. There was a cool sharp breeze which the rain left in its wake, a breeze which touched the skin briskly for a night in late summer.

Connaught House at 22 Spruce Street looked very American, from the colonial design of the house facade down to the single-brick wall which snaked to and fro in a series of S's to give it stability.

It looked like a cheerful enough place. There were lights in most of the lower windows, there was smoke from the kitchen pipe in the rear of the house. There was, indeed, little to support the theory of its being a nest of British agents, except for the black coach in the rear near the stables, and the four horses in the stables themselves.

Even in the dark, both Hamilton and Caleb could see that it was the same coach which had blocked the pike at Spear's Ridge.

"Don't figger how ye mean to get in," Caleb Woodstock whispered hoarsely. "They just won't open that door for ye if they get a look at ye, John."

"I don't intend for them to get a look," Hamilton said. "I want the door opened just a notch, so that the lock is undone, and then we enter."

"Just bust in?"

"On the contrary, like ghosts. Cal, peer close to those windows and see who is on the lower floor."

Caleb went silently through the bushes close to the house. He raised an eye to

one corner of a window and watched. He was back in an instant. "Two men. Never seen 'em before. One's a servant, other's like a home owner."

"Cartwright said that a Major Aintree would be here. Aintree is in charge here during Cartwright's absence. Doubtless, he is one. The other then?"

"Maybe a guard. Hiked out like a servant to make the place look normal 'stead of a spy's roost."

"Cal, tell me, Ferdinand says only Titus, Caxton, and Du Maurier came with the two women, besides the coach driver. Did the others fall at the Powder Horn?"

"Cartwright's a gone goose," Caleb said. "Didn't I tell you? The count put a bullet in him right off. Then two men came runnin' out when the fight started, they dropped. There was a third, Demarest they called him, but he was wounded by the count's sword. I guess they left him behind at the Powder Horn. That would make Ferdinand right."

"They're all upstairs then," Hamilton said. "Probably trying to torture poor René into disclosing the whereabouts of his duplicates which he no longer has. They'll have Anne upstairs, too. Who's in the kitchen?"

"I looked, *m'sieur,*" Ferdinand whispered hollowly. "A black man."

"All right then," Hamilton said. "Let's go. You have a pistol, Ferdinand? Good. Caleb?"

"Two loaded, and my knife."

"Quietly. Watch." Hamilton nodded at the window. "Then come with me."

HAMILTON mounted the steps to the door and knocked gently on the portal. Before the sound had faded, he drew his sword from its sheath and held it out before him. Caleb came quickly. "The servant is coming. He's got him a gun in his left hand, John!"

"The other man?"

"Stayed at the desk, waiting."

"Alarmed?"

"Didn't seem so."

"*Shh,* here he comes."

There were footsteps across the hall inside. A voice came close to the portal. "Who is it?"

"Message for Major Aintree," Hamilton said huskily. "Urgent!"

There was a pause. The servant turned the knob and a lock clicked. The door inched open a few inches. Then a gasp and the glint of a barrel. "You're not—"

Hamilton lunged. His sword passed through the portal, went on, and impaled the man behind the door. The man grunted and sagged. Hamilton quickly withdrew his blade and pushed the door open. He went inside like a streak, snatched the loaded pistol from the dying man's hand. The fellow lay on the floor his hands clutching his chest. Hamilton stepped over him and into the parlor.

The man at the desk had heard the low groan simultaneous with the thrust, and had just risen in alarm. Hamilton stepped into his sight and leveled the pistol. "Don't move, sir, or I'll blow your head off."

The man at the desk froze.

Hamilton went on, "Major Aintree?"

Major Aintree nodded, dumbly, taken by surprise completely.

"You may sit down. Keep your hands on the desk. Ferdinand, hold your pistol on this man. He is to sit like a stone. One movement of his hands and you have permission to kill him. Caleb, get the cook and put him in here, too. Hurry." All this he said in a low soft voice. Caleb brought the terrified darky back instantly. "Not a sound, not a move," Hamilton warned him, "or they'll feed you to the bobcats next full moon. If he makes a misstep you may kill him too, Ferdinand. Come on, Cal. Let's go up."

They went up the stairs silently. The hall was dim, lighted by but one candle. There were five doors up here. Three of them were closed. The open doors drew Hamilton. The rooms were empty.

"Well?" Caleb said.

"Anything can happen now," said Hamilton.

He boldly tried the knob of the first door he came to, and opened it with a

minimum of sound. Good fortune. Anne Norwood lay bound and gagged on the bed inside. There was no one guarding her. "By gad," Hamilton breathed. "We can thank our stars they're short of help. Cut her ropes, Cal. Anne, my darling, listen." Her blue eyes popped from behind the rim of the gag as she saw him. "Not a sound, my sweet, not a murmur, not a breath. Be still, and wait here. Stay and watch her, Caleb."

The gag was off then. "John, John!" she whispered. She flung herself at him into his arms. He could feel her whole body trembling with emotion. He kissed her quickly. "Be brave for a few more moments, Anne."

"I knew you'd come, I knew you'd find me."

"Cal, watch her."

"No, go with him. Give me a pistol. I'll defend myself."

Hamilton smiled. "You heard her, Cal. She talks like a Hamilton heir, does she not? Wait for us here. Who is in the next room?"

"Your brother, John. Be careful. He'll kill you—he hates you—"

"And the room beyond?"

"Caxton—Lady Desmond—they have a Frenchman—"

Hamilton turned quickly. He passed Titus' room and went to the last one, Caleb on his heels. He did not pause, but flung the door open and went in quickly.

LA TOURNADA, Milady Edith Desmond, went stark white. The blood drained from her face as she stood there and she swayed and dropped into a chair where she met the pressure of Caleb's other pistol on the back of her neck.

René Du Maurier, his face puckered with pain, sat bound in a chair opposite the door, while Major Rolph Caxton worked a thumbscrew cruelly on the comte's right hand.

Taken by surprise, Caxton made a leap for the pistol which he had left on the foot of the bed in the room, but Hamilton, laughing happily now, slashed down with the flat of his sword and raised a terrible welt on the back of the major's hand. "No, no, my little frog of Brattle Hill," Hamilton said, and for the first time in days, the old light danced in his eyes again. "Powder and lead are too easy, too brief. I promised you once that I would engage you when my business was not too pressing. That moment has arrived, Major. It shall be brandy for one."

Major Caxton glanced around him, but Caleb had taken the gun off the bed.

"No help from outside, Major," Hamilton promised. "Only the soldiers of Lafayette who hope to clean up here after us."

"I am unarmed," Major Caxton said with nasty politeness.

"We will take care of that," said Hamilton. "Cal, is Milady Desmond armed?"

"Don't seem so."

"Cut René loose then."

Caleb did so quickly, the razor-edged blade of his hunting knife going through the rope like lightning. As soon as the gag was off, René Du Maurier tried to speak but could not. He finally croaked, "John, my brave one—the papers?"

"Decoded at general headquarters. Both copies." Hamilton laughed. "And you, Major, where did you think *le comte* had hidden them?"

Major Caxton was white with rage. "I am waiting patiently, braggart, for a sword to carve my name upon your heart!"

"No," Edith Desmond said, slowly rising to her feet.

They all stared at her. "Madame?"

"No," she repeated. "No, John. You've won. You've beaten us. It's over. Let them catch us, let them hang us if they will. But don't fight him."

"I'm sorry milady fears for the major," Hamilton said, "but this cannot be put off."

"Don't be a young fool, my dear," she said sternly. "You know of whom I think. I have not hidden the fact from anyone. You cannot fight him. You lose too much, you gain nothing. John, he'll kill you. He's the devil, a beast."

"Thank you, milady," Major Caxton said with a cool smile and a mocking bow. "I value your opinion so highly."

"But she is right, this one," René said suddenly. "Better to give him to me, John."

There was a deep silence in the room for a moment. Then Hamilton reached over to where Caxton's own sword rested against a chair by the bed. He threw it to Caxton and said sarcastically, "It has always been my policy, Major, to explode myths. I am an iconoclast, you see. And I cannot forgo the pleasure of exploding this myth, despite the earnest pleas of my friends."

Caxton's sword flashed out. It caught up the candlelight along its steel and met Hamilton's with a ringing flash of light.

IN HIS own room, Titus Hamilton had heard the voices next door. He had listened intently, thinking perhaps that Major Caxton had finally persuaded the Frenchman to talk, but suddenly, he was aware of his brother's voice. There was no mistaking it.

His heavy face instantly darkened, his jaw set, and his eyes grew piggish. He rose from his bed and drew a robe around himself and picked up his own gun from the side-table, making sure it was loaded.

Then he moved slowly to the door and opened it noiselessly. He heard the initial clang as the swords crossed, and fear mingled with his intent. He glanced up and down the hall, saw no one. The other door was open. He walked silently to it and looked in.

He saw the duel.

At first he raised the pistol and aimed it at Hamilton's jerking back. But then Titus changed his mind. He smiled thinly and watched. It was apparent the duel would not last long. It was being fought too hard.

Indeed, it did not last five minutes. No sooner had the swords crossed and the first thrusts been exchanged than John Hamilton knew he was up against it. He had never been afraid in a duel before, but he was afraid now, and the fear made him feel cold and wet and seemed to numb his right hand. Certainly he was executing—and brilliantly—every trick that he had ever learned in fencing, but at the same time, he felt as though he were slow, and dull and wide open.

For La Tournada had spoken the truth. Major Rolph Caxton was a veritable devil with the steel. Hamilton's blade could not flick fast enough. Caxton's sword-point, like a tiny bead of light, was here was there, was gone. It was impossible to follow. And that was what made Hamilton afraid. He had met the one in his life he had not expected to meet, the man who was faster than himself with the sword. For what good were all the tricks when you could not parry the point which reached for your heart? And what good was a feint, a thrust or a lunge when you did not get a chance to use them yourself?

Caxton carried the fight. He fought savagely, beating and binding, his point flashing. Hamilton did not get a chance to lunge. He kept moving back, inch by inch, his heart cold. If he could only feel the weight of Caxton's sword—but it fell away from his own and came at him like the forked tongue of a snake, seemingly in two places at one time.

Hamilton parried by instinct, and that was dangerous. It was dangerous because instinct was not infallible. And in a few minutes, his back was against the opposite wall and even René Du Maurier, pale at the tactics of Caxton, whispered in awe, *"Sacré Dieu!"*

Hamilton knew what he must do. It took courage and nerve to do it, and the slightest slip would mean his death. Fiercely he beat down Caxton's sword and at last got in two thrusts which Caxton instantly parried off to the right.

And then it came. On the riposte, Major Caxton saw an opening and went for it. He feinted once, then lunged. Hamilton raised his own steel and guided the point of Caxton's sword away from his middle and up until the point reached him and buried itself deep in his left arm.

"He's killed!" Edith Desmond cried.

"Non!" René shouted. *"Non*, a scratch for a hole! A scratch for a hole!"

Instead of falling away from the sword which had impaled his left arm, Hamilton himself lunged forward, His face contorted in pain as Caxton's sword went through and twisted slightly. What he had done was mad to see, he had run himself upon that sword in his arm; instead of letting Caxton withdraw it, Hamilton had come forward so that the blade passed all the way through.

Mad? No, it was not mad. Comte Du Maurier had done it once in his life, and he recognized it again. A scratch for a hole. A wound for a life. For in that moment, Caxton's sword was immovable, its flashing point was stilled. It was a trick, the trick of a brave man, to take his opponent's blade so that he might use his own. In that moment, Major Caxton was trapped. He had nothing to parry the shining length of death which whipped forward quicker than one sees a bolt of lightning.

They hardly saw what happened. But there—Caxton's sword fell from Hamilton's arm, bloody. And Caxton himself was staring stonily, already dead, as he sagged to the floor. And as he dropped his body fell away and off Hamilton's rapier which had buried itself clean to the hilt in Caxton's heart.

TITUS HAMILTON saw all this from the doorway. For seconds, the horror of the thing worked through him, the horror of the death which cold steel gives. And then that horror turned to terror and fanned his dread and hatred of this brother who stood there, wounded, facing him, not fifteen feet away.

Titus raised his pistol quickly, aimed at John Hamilton's head.

Edith Desmond, turning her head from the sight of Caxton on the floor, saw the black muzzle of the pistol, aiming in from the hall.

With a cry she leaped for it. Titus Hamilton fired as she reached his hand. The blue smoke billowed into the room, and the report of the gun was sharp and left a deafening ring in all their ears. But Titus Hamilton had missed, and he stood there, panting, and saw Edith Desmond's hand whip up from beneath her skirt where her pearl-handled dagger nestled against her right knee. There was a ghastly sound from Titus, no screech, no scream, a sighing, terrible groan, and he fell away from her into the hall where he lay.

"Mon Dieu!" René cried. He leaped past Edith Desmond as she snatched a cloak from the bed and wrapped it around herself. He knelt by Titus and looked at him. René shuddered. Once he had lain so, with that little dagger in his stomach the way it sat there now in Titus Hamilton's, sunk, then twisted. He shuddered violently. He knew what Titus was feeling as death crept through him, stiffened him, then owned him.

"C'est tout," René Du Maurier called, rising.

"Bind this arm of mine," Hamilton said sharply. "Hurry, René. There are soldiers coming down the street. You can hear them. We've got to get her out of here."

"Her? Who?"

"Milady. They'll hang her if they catch her."

He wasted no more words. Not waiting to bind his arm, he dropped his sword and used his good arm. He wrapped it around her and pushed her along. "To the coach. Cal—get the horses bridled—help me, René—*gad!*"

He spat this last as Edith Desmond stumbled and fell. He dropped beside her instantly. "Milady!" René dropped to her other side. "Cal," called Hamilton. "Help. In this room. On the bed."

They carried her in. The black cloak clung to her body like a shroud. Her face was very white and her breathing shallow. On the bed, she opened her eyes. They grouped around her, the three of them. "Milady, my dear," Hamilton said gently, "are you all right?"

"I fainted," she whispered. "That is all."

"But you must leave. If these soldiers arrest you, it means—"

"No, that is all—unimportant."

"Edith!" Hamilton said sharply, suddenly afraid.

René gripped his arm tightly, and pointed to the bed. There was blood soaking through onto it, from beneath the black cloak.

"She is wounded!"

"He shot her!"

Edith Desmond's eyes opened again. Her hand rose, beckoned Hamilton closer to her. He went and knelt down beside her and took the hand. Her voice was faraway, a faint and scented whisper, "John, do you remember that night in Winchester—that which most we love, destroys us in the end." She gripped his hand tightly. "It's come true for I have loved you—more than life. . . ." And she sighed, very quietly and closed her eyes, to die.

There was a heavy silence. René Du Maurier cleared his throat. "I forgive you this," he whispered, staring at her body, as he touched the place where her knife had found him once. "I forgive you all I have said, and I retract my hate. For in the end, my dear, you are a woman, and women were not made for war."

THE house was suddenly filled with noise. Soldiers swarmed through it, hobnails and boots clumping up and down the stairs. An official recognized René Du Maurier, they embraced, and then Du Maurier vanished. Caleb Woodstock went out too, and lost himself in the men who had come in. There were rough voices from downstairs, some one said, "Major Aintree, you're under arrest!" And then more noise.

Hamilton stayed by the bed for a long time. His face was a granite mask. Finally he rose. He pulled the cloak up and covered Edith Desmond's pale face with it.

René Du Maurier found him standing by the window, looking vacantly down into the street below. He went over and put his arm around Hamilton, and he said gently, *"Mon ami,* it is *adieu."*

"Goodbye?" Hamilton said dully, without turning.

"Au 'voir perhaps, but this is war, *mon vieux. Adieu* is perhaps the way to look at it. I go north at dawn."

Hamilton turned. "René—why?"

"Dispatches for General Washington," René Du Maurier said, smiling. "And then Yorktown. Caleb and Ferdinand go with me. John, it is over, all over. I can feel it in these bones for a certainty. Tomorrow Richmond will be deserted. The soldiers march, the bugles blow, an army goes to meet its commander-in-chief. There will be a battle. We cannot lose. Cornwallis, he is outnumbered."

Hamilton sighed. "Then it is not goodbye, René. I'll go with you. What else would you have me do?"

René Du Maurier's eyes were misty. "I would have you return home, my friend. It is where you belong. An extra man is not needed. We have plenty of men here now."

Hamilton frowned. "There is something behind this?"

Du Maurier shrugged. *"Oui,* there is. Morgan's raiders have arrived. These Home Protectors of your brother? Some deserted to the American cause, the others have died or fled. They met, there was an encounter, they are no more. They never would have arrived to aid the British. It was an empty army at best. But I heard other news, John."

"What?"

"There is no more Norwood plantation."

Hamilton gasped. "René—"

"Wiped out. To the last man. They fired upon Continentals—"

"But Anne—"

"She is alone. She does not know yet, John. I thought it was for you to tell her. She is in her room, waiting. The officer, Captain Blakewell, an old friend of mine, he would not let her be disturbed by his soldiers. She is there."

Hamilton shivered openly.

"C'est la guerre," René Du Maurier

said quietly. "You will take her back, John? To Scarsta?"

"Yes," Hamilton said. "Yes, I'll take her back to Scarsta with me."

Du Maurier smiled, but there were honest tears in his eyes. "And so we part. But perhaps not forever, my good friend. Someday when this strife has died away and the country basks in its freedom, before I return to *la belle France,* I will see you again. I will come riding into Lace Falls and up the path to Scarsta, and you will both be there. I will count on that. And who knows—if it be long enough—there may be more than just you two, *non?* Perhaps a third one—the son of John Hamilton." He coughed and cleared his throat and added with great pride, "The son of a rogue."

They shook hands and then the little Frenchman turned and went out quickly and was gone.

Hamilton left the room and went down the hall. He opened the closed door, went in, and closed it behind him. Anne Norwood, lovely and soft somehow in her distress, rose quietly and walked to him. "John, John," she whispered. "What now?"

"We're going home," he said to her. "Home to Scarsta. We'll start at dawn."

"To Scarsta," she said.

"Yes."

He held her close and she stayed there, feeling happy and secure at last, knowing that this was the ultimate, and that nothing in life or death could change their love from that time forward.

THE END

ORIGINALLY SERIALIZED IN THE **JUNE 11, 18, 25, JULY 2** AND **9, 1938** ISSUES OF **ARGOSY WEEKLY**

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